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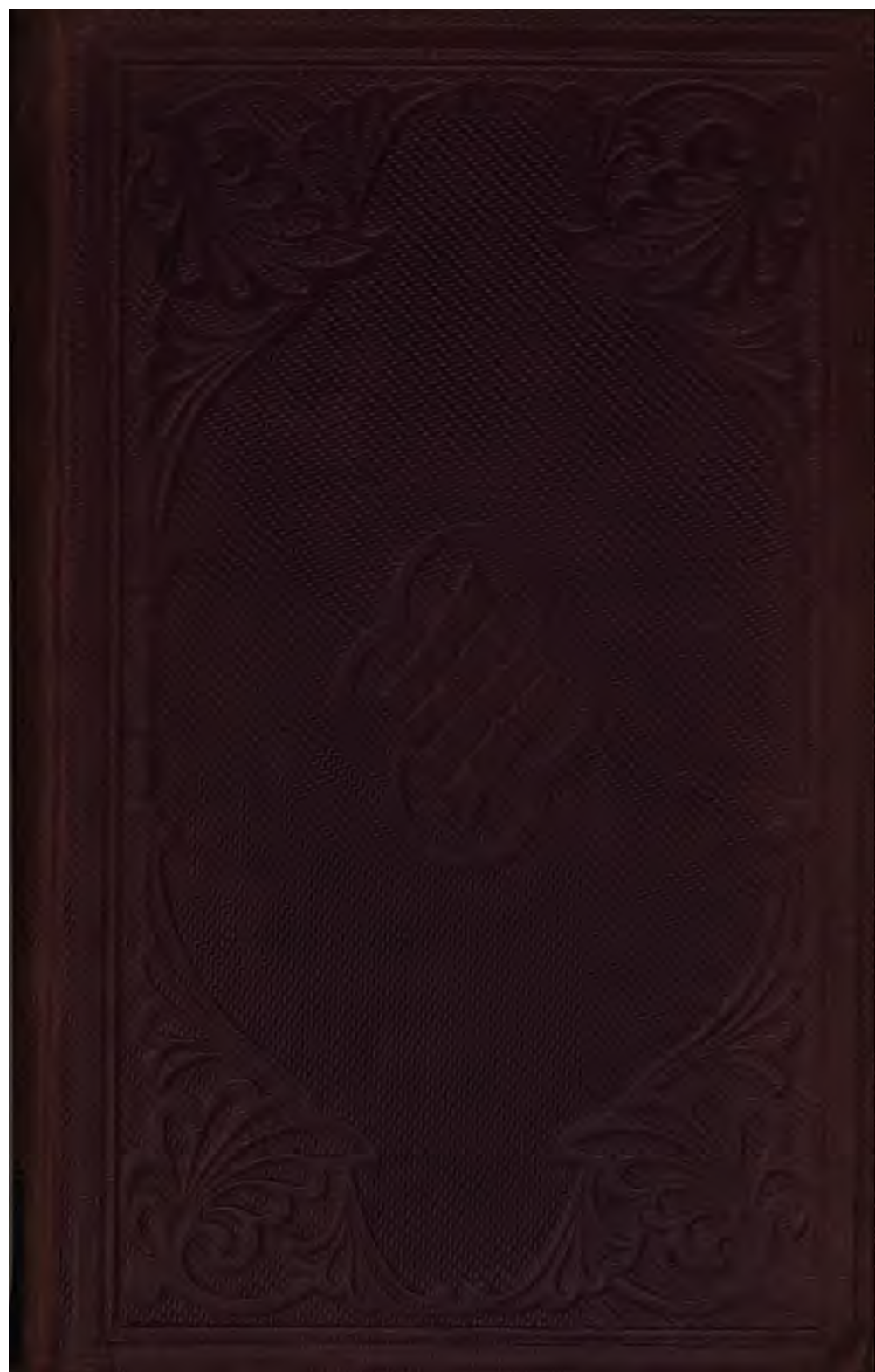
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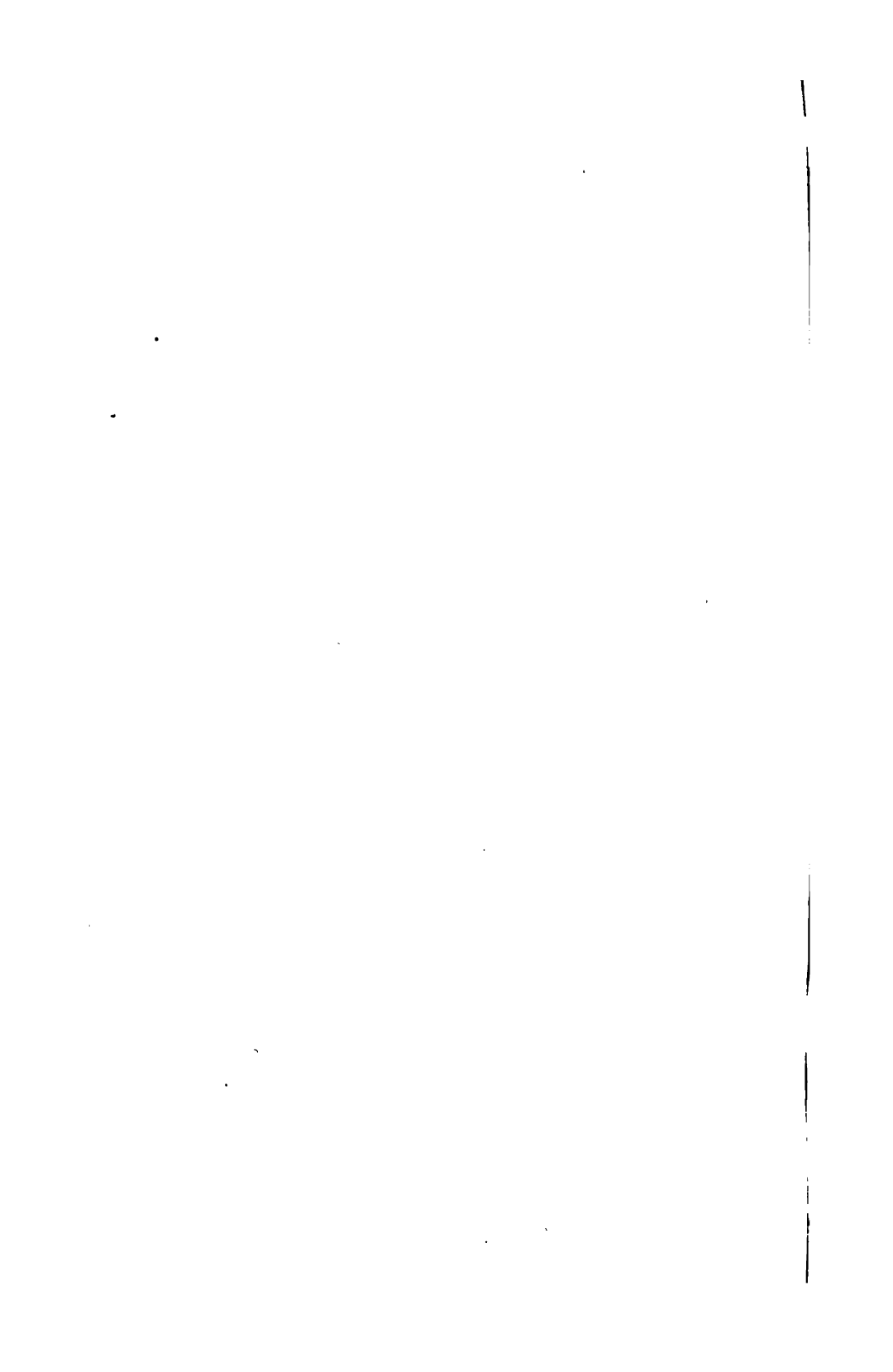




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# AFTER LONG YEARS.

## CHAPTER I.

### BEFORE THE WEDDING.

"A BRIGHT, bright day for your wedding, my Lizzie," spoke out a cheerful, matronly voice, as its owner entered with privileged step a young girl's *sanctum sanctorum* almost as soon as the sun had risen on a fair May morning. "I am so glad that the threatening of those clouds last night has not been fulfilled. Wide awake, love? but I hope you *have* slept well, and are feeling strong and brave enough for all the fatigues of the day."

"Strong and brave enough for everything but saying good-bye to you, mamma," replied

sweet Lizzie Anstruther, springing up in bed, and clasping her mother's neck with such vigour and impetuosity, that the good lady—grown stout and somewhat asthmatic of late years—had to beg laughingly for mercy. "But I don't promise you that I shan't break down utterly and commit all sorts of childish follies when that ceremony has to be gone through. Oh, mamma, one need be very fond of the man one is to marry, to leave for his sake a home such as mine has been!"

"Is that the conclusion my Lizzie has just come to?" asked the mother, as she suffered her loving eyes to rest for a second or two admiringly upon the young, wistful face, up-turned to her own.

"No, mamma, I have felt it all along; more now than ever, though. Sarah stayed talking to me a long while last night, and I could not get to sleep after she had left me. I am afraid dear Sarah will feel my going away very much; it seems vain to say so, but I have been thinking a great deal about

it. If Kitty were a little older it would not matter—”

“Kittie will never be to Sarah what you have been, my Lizzie; but we must all learn to do without you, and to forgive the stranger who has invaded our quiet dwelling and stolen our sweetest home flower. If only he makes you happy, and treats you as tenderly as we have done, I, for my part, shall graciously extend a pardon to him; do you think he will care to take it, Lizzie darling?”

This was asked laughingly, but there was at the same time a look of something like anxiety in the mother’s eye that did not escape her daughter’s notice.

“Mamma, you do not understand Frederick. Sarah prejudices you against him—not intentionally, I know, dear girl! but unconsciously, and because, do what she will, her own dislike to him is always oozing out and influencing the minds of others on the subject. But wait, mamma, a little patiently—you and Sarah and all of you—and you shall

confess that your spoiled Lizzie has not been so wrong in her judgment; you shall see and acknowledge that she is the happiest and most fortunate wife in the whole world."

"God grant it, my dearest! but Lizzie love, I have never thought of calling your judgment in question, for the simple reason that I am sure no such faculty has been exercised by you in this matter. When the heart speaks in favour of any individual, as yours from the very first has spoken in favour of Frederick Leonard, why then, my child, the judgment is never even appealed to. We, the lookers on, have judged this young man, Lizzie—you have only loved him."

"And must love him for ever, mamma, come what may," exclaimed pretty Lizzie, rosy-cheeked now, and bending the fair head, with its coils of sunny hair, till it was hidden on her mother's ample shoulder; "but indeed, indeed, I feel my happiness, as far as Frederick is concerned, a perfectly assured thing. You all acknowledge that he loves me dearly."

“ Yes, yes, my darling, it would be something more than strange if he did not, and my hope and prayer is, that this love will prove strong enough in the coming days to carry all before it. Another kiss, my Lizzie, for there is Sarah, I believe, knocking at your door, and as she is to be your sole tirewoman I shall have to make immediate way for her. Don’t forget, either of you, that our family breakfast, the last you will share with us, as Lizzie Anstruther, will be ready at half-past eight. Now good-bye, dearest, though indeed I have not said half of what I came to say.”

As Mrs. Anstruther turned away reluctantly from the bed which contained her darling, a tall, dark, slightly-made girl, entered the room, and was at once enclosed in the impulsive Lizzie’s embrace ; hugged, and squeezed, and kissed, to such an extent, that had not her powers of endurance been limitless, she must, like her mother, have cried aloud for mercy. As it was, she only cried softly and

quietly, and this—not for mercy—but because the dear sister whom she loved better than her own life was going to leave them all, and to be married to a man, whom she, Sarah Anstruther,—grown prematurely wise through much sorrow and some wrong—could not help regarding as totally unworthy of the jewel about to be committed to his care.

“Lizzie, I have come to dress you,” Sarah said, the moment she found herself relieved from the hugging ceremony, and while the tears were still glistening in her own dark eyes—“and you must make haste now, because I know your hair will take me a long time. Have you slept as well as you promised me you would, Lizzie?”

“Nearly as well, Sarah, and it would have been quite, if that pale, sad face of yours, had not haunted me so long after we parted. Sarah, darling—” springing out of bed as she spoke, and beginning to unroll the masses of golden hair that her sister was to dress for the wedding—“Sarah, darling, I will never

forgive you if you don't come to me in London the instant we return from the Continent. Think how delightful it will be to have you all to myself in a house of my own!"

"Dear Lizzie!"

"Ah, but 'dear Lizzie' is no answer to my petition," said this spoiled child, jerking her head from under Sarah's hands, and looking up resolutely into her grave sister's face—"Do you mean to come to me in London or not, Sarah?"

"Lizzie, we shall never get these tresses of yours arranged at this rate. Hold your head down again if you please, young lady, and keep it very still indeed—I will certainly visit Mrs. Frederick Leonard the moment *Mr.* Frederick Leonard invites me to do so—does that pin I have just put in hurt you, dear child?"

"No, but your suspicion of Frederick does. As if he would not be delighted to welcome any or all of my family to his



house, Sarah! Ah, how very little you know him."

"Has he ever told you he would be delighted so to do, Lizzie?"

After a sufficiently long pause for consideration of this question:

"Perhaps not exactly in words, because we have never happened to discuss the matter; but of course in taking *me* into his heart, Frederick takes into it (in a minor degree) all whom I love. If it had been otherwise, he would not have grown so dear to me that the thought of your mistrusting him causes me the bitterest pain, and casts a shadow even over this day, that ought to be wholly bright."

"Lizzie, let us talk about something else, something on which we can entirely agree—do you know I have been thinking seriously during the night of asking mamma to keep Kitty at home for me to educate. I believe I could teach her as much as she is taught at school, and when you are gone my life will be so painfully devoid of interest."

"An excellent idea, Sarah. Little Kit will be enchanted, and the occupation will do you a world of good. In the holidays you must both come—"

Here Lizzie arrived at a full stop, and bit her pretty lips till they were redder than lips had any right to be.

"I had forgotten," she explained presently, and then the little head grew so tremulous with excitement that the *coiffeure* (fortunately a very Griselda for patience) had some difficulty in continuing her task.

"My darling," Sarah whispered soothingly, "you do not need to be told that we will come to see you whenever circumstances permit our doing so, only you must try to remember, Lizzie, that as a married woman you will have another will besides your own to consult—the happiest wives soon discover this, and, if they are wise, patiently submit to it."

"I am afraid I should not be wise," said Lizzie, in a low voice, and with a look that

was rarely seen on her pretty face, "if my husband's will kept any whom I love away from me; but don't let us fight with shadows, Sarah. Before another hour has passed you shall confess that you have done my poor Frederick cruel injustice—you shall receive from him a most pressing invitation to our house that is to be, in Mayfair."

"Your hair is finished, Lizzie, and, I flatter myself, a complete success. Do please come to the glass, and see how you like it. I assure you I am charmed with my own work."

Lizzie would have preferred having her last observation responded to, but it was nearly a threadbare subject now, that of Sarah Anstruther's prejudice against Frederick Leonard, so the young bride elect contented herself with a little pout, and then rose and stood with her sister before the cheval glass at the other end of the room.

What a strange contrast there was between the two girls, and how strikingly it came

out as the two faces so close together were reflected back from the mirror's polished surface—one with her large, tender blue eyes, rose tinted skin, and golden hair, a fit emblem of sunshine,—the other with her dark, faded complexion, and prematurely saddened look, an equally just representation of shade. Lizzie Anstruther at eighteen was as bewitchingly pretty, as captivating in face and form and manner, as it is possible for a mortal woman to be. Sarah Anstruther at twenty-four was outwardly, and to strangers, nearly the reverse of all this. Her figure, indeed, would have been good, but for the stoop that had become habitual to it—her hair was black and glossy enough, and her eyes decidedly fine; but every other feature as well as the complexion had been marred by that disease occasionally so fatal to feminine attractions, and having in the present case left little hope of time even softening the cruel ravages that had been made.

At home they had grown accustomed to

Sarah's changed appearance—to her ugliness (for that was the right term), and the innate worth of her character procured her, amongst her own people, as much love as if she had been the fairest of the fair. But strangers could not help sometimes shrinking from her a little, and either from discovering this, or from some other cause, her manner towards them was cold and uninviting; she disliked society; she recoiled instinctively from all new faces, and in the whole neighbourhood there was not so unpopular an individual as poor Sarah Anstruther—Mrs. Anstruther's eldest daughter, and sister to that pretty bright-eyed Lizzie, who had won the coveted heart and hand of the fastidious, aristocratic, and wealthy Frederick Leonard.

“Happy Lizzie, lucky girl!” sighed the young ladies, who had angled skilfully but in vain for the great matrimonial prize. “Will she ever fully appreciate her marvellous good fortune?”

Ah, who can say? who can answer that

very pertinent question? Looking at her as she stands now, fully arrayed in bridal white, with the flush of joy upon her fair young cheek, and the light of love kindling in her soft blue eye, one would see at least that she was entering the path before her with very vivid anticipations concerning its brightness. But the gates are yet fast closed, and all that is beyond she has received on trust or by hearsay only. No doubt the flowers grow in greater profusion than even her fond imagination has painted, along that golden pathway; no doubt it is warmer and brighter than even he who is to tread it with her has assured her it will be. But wait till she has fairly got on the other side of the gates—wait till she has walked only a few hours in the heat of the day, along the road that shines so brilliantly in the distance, and then ask sweet Lizzie Anstruther, and get a truthful answer if you can, whether she fully appreciates the marvellous good fortune that she alone has been happy enough to secure.

## CHAPTER II.

## LIZZIE'S DAY DREAMS.

THE beams of that bright May morning sun danced merrily upon the walls, and lighted up every corner of the pleasant breakfast parlour where Mrs. Anstruther and her youngest daughter sat waiting the coming down of the two girls with whom we have just been lingering.

"What a time they are," said restless Miss Kitty, a small fair child of about twelve years old. "I want my breakfast, mamma, and then I want to be dressed myself. Lucy thinks I shall look very nice and smart in my new pink frock and white bonnet—she says I ought to have been one of Lizzie's bridesmaids,

that sisters always are, little or big. Why wasn't I, mamma?"

"I am afraid Lucy talks a great deal of nonsense to you, Kitty," replied mamma, rather absently, for her eyes were fixed on the door through which her darling was presently to enter, and her ear was strained to catch the first sound of the bride's light footstep on the stairs.

"But why wasn't I, mamma?" repeated the child, who was rather addicted to persevere with her questions—"I should like so much to have been a bridesmaid as well as the Miss Clares. Did you think me too little?"

"No, Kitty, I did not think about you in this matter at all. As Sarah declined acting for her sister, it would never have done to have had you. The Clares are Mr. Leonard's friends."

"I know that, but some people have lots of bridesmaids. I wonder why Sarah wouldn't be one. Lucy and the other servants don't



think it was her fault. I heard every word they said about it."

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty, you must get out of talking and listening to the servants, as you do, or I shall be seriously displeased with you, and perhaps send Lucy quite away. What fresh nonsense have you heard now?"

Mrs. Anstruther was one of the last women in the world to be interested in the gossip of the servants' hall, but she had her own reasons for wishing to be informed of their remarks on this occasion. And little Miss Kitty, nothing loth to find herself attended to at last, eagerly continued—

"Well, they said Sarah couldn't be one of Lizzie's bridesmaids because she was so plain, and Mr. Leonard couldn't bear ugly faces near him. They knew it, because Mrs. Clare had wanted to recommend the daughter of one of her old servants as a lady's maid for Lizzie, and when he heard about it he asked if the girl was pretty, and they said she wasn't at all, and so he wouldn't let Mrs. Clare speak

about her to Lizzie. I don't think I should like to be going to be married to Mr. Leonard, should you, mamma?"

"No," replied Mrs. Anstruther; but her tone was abrupt and expressive of some inward irritation or annoyance that for the moment silenced Kitty, though, not believing herself to be the offender, a very knowing look settled on the little lady's face, as she watched her mother pacing up and down the room in as restless a mood as her own had lately been.

"Kitty!"

"Yes, mamma."

"Let nothing ever tempt you to repeat to Sarah such impertinent remarks about her as you have just repeated to me; and the next time you hear anything of the same sort, accidentally or otherwise, come and tell me at once. I would change every servant in the house rather than have dear Sarah's feelings wounded."

"Very well, mamma; but I think Mr.

Leonard is worse than the servants. Why does Lizzie like him so much?"

"Don't talk about Mr. Leonard," exclaimed the mother with a sudden flash of the eye, which proved that Kitty had approached the real source of her excitement. "Little girls like you cannot be any judges of persons more than double your age. Sit down now, Kitty, and be quiet; I hear your sisters coming."

After Lizzie had been duly admired and caressed by the two members of the family who now saw her for the first time in her wedding finery, they all took their places at the breakfast table, each trying to set an example of cheerfulness, and each, with the exception of giddy little Kittie, signally failing in the attempt. Under the most favourable circumstances it is hard to lose from a small home circle the one who has been its brightest light and its fairest ornament, but it becomes doubly, trebly hard when there is a doubt on the minds of those who are left, concerning the worthiness of the in-

dividual to whose keeping is committed the future happiness of the darling they are losing.

Frederick Leonard might be a great match, a *rara avis*, a paragon of all perfection in the eyes of the world at large, as well as in the estimation of the tender-hearted, enthusiastic girl he had chosen ; but he had certainly not succeeded in winning even a moderate share of esteem from his young bride's relatives, to whom, therefore, Lizzie's wedding day could not possibly be a joyous occasion.

Very soon after the quiet family breakfast, the guests who were to accompany the bridal party to the church began to arrive. Mrs. Anstruther received them in the drawing-room, while Sarah and Kitty went through the duties of their own adornment, and Lizzy (who had nothing more to do, and felt no inclination to be stared at before her time) wandered somewhat restlessly about the deserted rooms of her old home, thinking it odd that any grains of sadness should be found

lurking in the sparkling cup which this day of all days it was her undoubted right and privilege to drink.

But somehow there was an uncomfortable, unsettled look about all the house this morning. The rooms not immediately required for the entertainment in connection with the wedding, had been left unswept and undusted; even the windows remaining closed and curtained as they had been the night before. Then the long passages, on the upper story, were almost blockaded by trunks of every shape and size—the bride's luggage; some of which was to go with her, on her wedding tour, and the rest to be sent down straight to Pengarthen Hall, Mr. Leonard's family seat in Cornwall.

Lizzie stood contemplating this formidable array of personal property for several minutes with a very thoughtful, sober look upon her girlish face. Till now she had never owned a fiftieth part of the treasures of various kinds those strapped and corded boxes contained.

From the moment her wedding day had been fixed, presents had showered in upon her from all quarters—chiefly from her own relatives and friends, because Mr. Leonard had no very near connections surviving; in the way of family ties only a step mother, his father's widow, who resided at Pengarthen Hall, and had the privilege of continuing to do so, if she wished it, for the term of her life. Frederick had not inspired Lizzie with a favourable opinion of this lady, and the young bride was consequently glad when she found that Mrs. Leonard, though duly apprised of the coming nuptials, sent her nothing, and declined the invitation to be present at the wedding.

“Just like her,” Frederick had candidly acknowledged—“a mean, stingy, hypocritical, unfeeling old dowager”—(those were the names he called her)—and it was no wonder that, seeing everything with his eyes, Lizzie should anticipate with anything but pleasure those months in every year which she

not be wholly unconnected with the solution of the mystery.

Before the closed door of one of the rooms at the end of the passage she has just come down, Lizzie again stands still, and appears to be thinking intently. She knows that door is locked, has been locked for nearly a twelve-month, during which period she has not once felt any special desire to enter it—but things are changed now; she is going to leave her home, *as* her home, for ever. Mother, sisters, brother, all will henceforth be something different to her from what they have hitherto been—not less dear, perhaps, but still not just the same. And who could tell whether she should ever see poor Willie, good, tender-hearted, darling Willie again—the only brother, the youngest except Kitty, the sick one of the family, who, after two years of acute suffering, had been ordered a long sea voyage as the most probable, if not the only likely means of restoring, to any

degree of vigour, a health that had always been extremely delicate.

So this is no mysterious, blue-beard chamber before which Lizzie stands, but only the bedroom of William Anstruther, that has never been entered since he went away on that long, doubtful voyage, whose perils the fond mother magnifies a thousand fold, and whose capabilities of giving him back his lost strength she mistrusts in her heart of hearts. If she did not, why should she lock up the room he had last slept in, as we sometimes lock up the rooms of the beloved dead ; and why should she shrink from speaking in the family circle of his return amongst them, and turn pale whenever the name of Willie, *any* Willie, accidentally fell upon her ear ?

It was of all this, and much more in connection with it, that Lizzie was thinking as she paused in her restless wanderings before the door of her brother's room, and wished that she could have seen the inside of it just once more. She did not indeed believe that



his case was hopeless (youth knows better than to anticipate evil), but there was this morning such an overflowing tide of tenderness in her heart towards all the dear ones she was leaving, that she wanted to carry away with her some little stolen relic of each one, which should serve to bring them hereafter more vividly before her, than all their separate gifts, freely and lovingly bestowed would be able to do. Willie knew nothing of this marriage as yet, and therefore from him there was not even a gift to bear to the new home where the old faces would cease to be familiar.

Lizzie must content herself with a few well-worn letters, written on his voyage out to Australia, and with a tiny sprig plucked from a tree he had planted in the flower garden just before his long illness. But a few months more, and he would be back in his own country, and then he should come and stay with her at Pengarthen Hall, and she would nurse and pet him, this dear, dear

brother, oh, so tenderly! And Frederick would love him for her sake, and join with her in devising schemes for his amusement and—

“You naughty, naughty child! I have been all over the house in search of you. I was beginning to be quite alarmed, and to think unpleasantly of *Giuevra* and the old oak chest. *Lizzie* darling, come and have your veil on. They are all ready and waiting for you.”

“*Sarah*, how you startled me. I had really no idea it was so late. I have been wandering about alone, and dreaming.”

Poor child! it might have been well could some of her innocent dreams have lasted a little longer.

## CHAPTER III.

## AT THE WEDDING AND AFTER.

THE bridal party had returned from church amidst a clash of joyous bells that, however musical, gave one or two of the elder ladies a nervous headache, and certainly helped to increase the heartache that poor Sarah Anstruther had all the morning been suffering from. They rang out so cheerily and defiantly, those noisy marriage bells, as if they were saying, "You see the deed is done, and all your croaking and all your fears can never, never undo it." The young men declared the ringers were "going it" in "jolly style,"

and approved highly of the uproar ; and the young ladies whispered to each other that there was always something saddening to their minds in the sound of marriage bells, and that very sweet as they were, it would be more agreeable to their feelings when they had finished ringing.

But breakfast came with all its little accompanying excitements, and the offending bells were no longer heeded. There were toasts to be given and responded to ; speeches to be made and listened to ; the bride and bridegroom to be gazed at with never flagging interest and curiosity ; and all the delicacies of the season—not to mention some rare old wines that had remained *perdu* in a dark cellar since Colonel Anstruther's death, eight years ago—to be partaken of *ad libitum*. It was no wonder that the elder ladies recovered from their headaches, and the younger ones from their depression, under circumstances so eminently calculated to promote the health both of mind and body.

Of course the bride looked dazzlingly lovely and the bridegroom radiantly happy, and of course the young men of the party, gazing at the blooming Lizzie, thought 'well he might,' and equally, of course, the young ladies, stealthily admiring the handsome Frederick, decided that his wife had something to look lovely about.

"An admirably matched couple," said a puffy old gentleman, who had done more than justice to the good things set before him, and was now at leisure to make observations—"an admirably matched couple, ma'am, and setting out upon life's voyage, as one may call it, with every chance of fair and prosperous gales. Young Leonard can't be worth less than twelve thousand a year, and he comes of a good old Cornish family. A fine match, ma'am, between ourselves, for a girl who has only her pretty face, uncommonly pretty I grant you, but still only her pretty face, I say, to recommend her."

The lady addressed happened to be the

Rector's wife, and to have known Lizzie intimately some fourteen or fifteen years.

"I think," she replied, warmly (there are a few women who love to stand up in each other's defence), "I think Mrs. Frederick Leonard has very much besides her rare beauty to recommend her. There is not a sweeter, gentler, dearer girl in the whole world. If I had been her mother I should never have considered any man good enough for her."

The puffy old gentleman who detested argument of the most superficial kind, was quite taken aback by this spirited reply to his very simple observation.

"I make no doubt of it, ma'am," he said, quickly; "the young lady looks remarkably amiable as well as remarkably lovely. I only spoke, you know, after the manner of men, in reference to her being without fortune."

"I know nothing about that," returned his companion, loftily (she was a strong-minded woman, and saw that she had got her foot

upon her neighbour's neck), "but I know that hundreds of young men, as rich and well born as Mr. Frederick Leonard, would have been proud to marry Lizzie Anstruther. Dear child! we shall all miss her terribly in this neighbourhood, and she'll miss her old friends by and bye, or I'm much mistaken. Pray, sir" (here she turned and faced her adversary so sharply that the old gentleman felt quite nervous), "pray, sir, do you consider Mr. Leonard's a good face?"

"A handsome face, ma'am, very handsome —there can't be two opinions, I think, about that."

"Satan is nearly always painted with a handsome face, sir," retorted the lady, with increasing severity; "my question referred to the goodness, not the mere outline beauty of Mr. Leonard's physiognomy."

"Really, ma'am, I am neither a disciple of Spurzheim nor Lavater," said the poor old gentleman, beginning to feel the unpleasant symptoms of being brow-beaten; "I don't

pretend to read characters at a glance ; besides, I am rather short-sighted."

"Oh, are you ? then you ought to wear spectacles. I am no physiognomist myself, but or all that I should have been sorry for a daughter of mine to marry Frederick Leonard."

"Pray, what's the matter with him, ma'am ?"

The elderly gentleman had plucked up a little spirit at last, as even worms are said to do when they are too mercilessly trodden upon.

"His eyes want frankness," replied the rector's wife, "and there are some hard curves about that handsome mouth of his. I may be wrong, of course, but to my mind he looks dangerous. Lizzie Anstruther has the meekness of a dove, and I am very much afraid she has got into the claws of a vulture."

Before the gentleman could reply to this very bold opinion, there was a movement at the other end of the table, indicating that the



bride was about to retire to dress for her journey, and that the breakfast party had broken up.

Lizzie had got on bravely till now—she knew that Frederick's sensitive feelings would have been wounded by seeing a single tear in her eye—but here, away from his jealous observation, in her own room with her mother, Sarah, and little Kitty clinging fondly around her, the girl's self-command entirely deserted her, and for nearly ten minutes she sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

Mrs. Anstruther and Kitty cried too—they could as little help it as Lizzie—but to Sarah came no such relief as tears; only the cold whiteness of her face and lips showed that she suffered in reality more than either of them.

They all knew, however, that there must be a speedy end to this sort of thing. Mr. Frederick Leonard would not like to be kept waiting, or to see on his pretty Lizzie's face those ugly red blotches which tears have a

malicious habit of leaving ; so at length the bride was divested of her bridal finery, and attired in a sober grey silk, which did not make her look one bit more matronly, and then the tears were commanded back to the place they came from—a mighty reservoir if Lizzie had only known it—and the three ladies, followed by the still unconsolated Kitty, went down into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Leonard had to take leave of all the friends and acquaintances who had assembled this day to do honour to her nuptials.

The bridegroom performed his part with the utmost grace and graciousness, assuring Mrs. Anstruther, as he shook her cordially by the hand, that her darling's happiness was very safe in his keeping. To Sarah he said (as Lizzie had that morning promised for him):—

“ I hope, Miss Anstruther, we shall have the pleasure of seeing you in London some time next month. Your sister will hardly reconcile herself to her new home if, in the

beginning, she has no familiar faces around her."

Sarah only bowed—there was a choking in her throat just then which absolutely forbade her speaking. Mr. Leonard bit his lip. If, to please his bewitching Lizzie, he had done violence to his own feelings, he had at least expected thanks, gratitude, something different to the cold politeness which, hitherto, had been all that Sarah Anstruther had ever bestowed upon her future brother-in-law.

He bit his lip then, and looked on the ground for a moment. Immediately afterwards he lifted his head, and fixed the eyes which the rector's wife had said wanted frankness, full upon Sarah's white face.

"I named London in preference to Pengarthen Hall," he said, with a slow distinctness of utterance that made every word a separate stab, "because I knew it would be unpleasant for you to go into a neighbourhood, where you might any day be liable to meet that fellow who used you so badly."

No colour came into Sarah's face, and it could not turn whiter than it had been before—only the mouth a little changed its expression as her new brother spoke to her, and from that expression he shrank as a coward would shrink when suddenly confronted with those who had witnessed his deed of baseness.

They parted, these two, without even a pretence of hand-shaking, though fortunately for Lizzie's peace of mind she was wholly unconscious of the fresh breach between them.

The bride and bridegroom, quite happy and content at present in each other's love, and in the aspect of that smooth and shining sea on which they had embarked, went forth joyously into their new life together, while the broken circle at home sat down mournfully to think of what they had lost, and to feel, that after all, a wedding has little claim to be reckoned amongst earth's gladsome festivals.

No one except Kitty spoke much of Lizzie or her husband that first day, and on more than one occasion her small ladyship had to complain that her remarks were totally unheeded. Mamma and Sarah were indeed anything but amusing companions after the company had departed, and Kitty had no resource but to betake herself and her smart pink frock to the work-room upstairs, where Lucy, and from time to time one of the other maids, had plenty to say on the subject of the morning's ceremony.

Amongst them they had made the interesting discovery that Frances Clare had looked pale and miserable, and that she was madly in love with Mr. Leonard, who had been staying at her father's house these two months past, and no doubt, as the sage Miss Lucy remarked, had courted her for his own amusement, before ever he saw "our sweet Miss Lizzie."

"Frances Clare is very handsome, too," spoke up little Kitty, quite accustomed, you

see, to take part in these discussions, "and if Mr. Leonard courted her, Lucy, and she wanted him all the time, why didn't they marry? I wish they had, and then Lizzie would not have gone away from us."

"And you're not the only one who wishes that, I daresay, Miss Kitty, but there's a fate in these things, I think, and so poor Miss Lizzie's fate was to become Mrs. Frederick Leonard."

"But that can't be the reason, Lucy, why Frances Clare didn't marry him," urged Kitty, who was evidently more of a logician than a predestinarian,—“Why didn't she?”

"Bless the dear child! how should I know? Perhaps he never asked her. Gentlemen like him make love to lots of young ladies they never mean to marry. Miss Fanny Clare is pretty, certainly, but I suppose she wasn't just pretty enough for Mr. Frederick Leonard."

"Oh," said Kitty, after a sufficiently pro-

longed pause—"Do you think that was the reason? Then I hope Lizzie will keep pretty always, or he may want to change her for somebody else. I don't like him a bit, Lucy, and I'll never kiss him, or call him brother."

"Hush, hush, Miss Kitty dear," entreated Lucy, who began to fear perhaps that both she and her young companion were getting a little out of their depth, "What can you or me know of fine, grown-up gentlemen, like your new brother-in-law. It is your duty now to be very fond of him, as I am sure Master Willie will be when he comes home—and please, Miss, don't say a word in the parlour of what you have heard about Miss Frances Clare,—it's only foolish talking, you know, and means nothing."

While this same foolish talking was going on in the work-room at Linden House, Frances and Alice Clare were somewhat wearily laying aside the very elegant and costly lace dresses in which they had recently appeared in their

character of bridesmaids at Lizzie Anstruther's wedding.

"Thank goodness it is over!" said Alice, the eldest sister, sighing and yawning alternately, as she pulled out the pins from scarf, sash, and head gear. "I do so hate all this sort of thing by daylight. If people must marry, why can't they do it in the evening? Doesn't your head ache, Fan?"

"No, but I am as tired as you can be. That breakfast was such a hopelessly weary affair. Mrs. Anstruther and Sarah both looked as if they had been offering up Lizzie as a sacrifice. Frederick must have felt flattered if he noticed their very miserable faces. I should really like to know what some people would have?"

"These people," replied Alice, with a little smile that she did not let her sister see, "evidently would rather not have had Frederick Leonard for a son and brother-in-law, and upon my word I don't blame them, Fan.



Lizzie is far too good and too pretty for half the men in the kingdom."

"That may be, though I can't see it," candidly acknowledged Frances—"and yet she may not be too good or too pretty for Frederick Leonard. I don't think she is, you know, Alice."

"I am aware of our difference of opinion on this point," said Alice, with another yawn, as she leant back half unrobed in her easy chair—"but I'm much too tired for an argument to-day, my dear. If I'd been you, Fan, I'd have put some rouge on my cheeks this morning."

"Some rouge, Alice—why should I? Didn't I look well enough—for a bridesmaid?"

"But I would have tried for several reasons to look better than well enough! Nothing would please Frederick more than to think, and to have others think, you were pining for him."

"I am not pining, Alice, and you know it."

This was spoken with some spirit, and just a touch of temper, but tears were in the bright, long-fringed eyes, for all that.

"My dear Fanny, it is of little moment what I know, or do not know, in the matter. The world will not look at you through sisterly or motherly spectacles. I don't want people, any people, to say you are fretting about the desertion of such a vain and inconstant butterfly as this Frederick Leonard."

"This Frederick Leonard!" retorted Frances, growing red enough now to make Alice's suggestion in reference to the rouge-pot appear quite an absurdity—"This Frederick Leonard is free from the slightest blame in connection with myself. If I admire and respect him above all other men in the world, that is surely not his fault. I have told you before that he never made love to me—he was only kind, and friendly, and gentle, as he might have been to a sister who

appreciated him as I did, and always shall. Alice, I don't want to argue any more than you do, and I am tired now, very tired, but I must repeat, while we are on this subject, that you and many others do poor Frederick cruel injustice, and that it is my firm and solemn conviction he will turn out a noble character, and make the very best of husbands."

"*Qui vivra verra!*" said Alice, carelessly, but beneath her nonchalance of manner there was something which spoke of very tender pity and affection for the foolish sister who was thinking that the only happy lot in the wide world had just been cast into the lap of Lizzie Anstruther.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE YOUNG COUPLE AT HOME.

LIZZIE had come down very early into the breakfast room on the morning succeeding her arrival with her husband at the very elegant little mansion he had furnished expressly for his young wife in May fair. Their month on the continent had served to make them more in love with each other than ever, and if Mrs. Anstruther and Sarah could have seen their darling now—on this brilliant June morning, as she stood amongst the rare exotics that Frederick had ordered in for her—they would have acknowledged that up to the present

time, at least, he had faithfully fulfilled his promise of taking good care of her.

Mr. Leonard was not a very early riser himself, which his wife regretted, as the simple country habits in which she had been trained made it impossible for her to sleep after seven or eight o'clock; but she was moderately fond of reading, and usually employed the hour or two Mr. Frederick kept her waiting for her breakfast, in looking over the new books and periodicals, with which since her marriage she had been very abundantly supplied.

But on this particular morning Lizzie felt no inclination at all to sit down to anything. She was at home, and there was such a delicious excitement in the thought, that occupation appeared a simple impossibility. Her husband's home—the home that she was throughout their joint lives to make bright and happy for him—the home that he had given her, that his boundless love had adorned with everything that could please the most

fastidious taste—the home they were henceforth to share together! Perhaps this last was the sweetest thought of all to the young, adoring wife, who, without any very brilliant talents or accomplishments, had a faculty for loving what she did love with an intensity that promised at least as much pain as pleasure in her life's journey.

She was very happy this morning, though she could not rest, and she had the longing of an innocent, affectionate child, that those dear ones at home—the other home—should witness her exceeding happiness, not only that they might rejoice in it as she knew they would, but that they might do more justice to him who was the very sun and centre, no less than the author of her full and deep contentment.

She meant, as soon as Frederick appeared, to ask his permission to write for Sarah and Kitty to come to her immediately. The former would be a delightful companion at all

the gay parties, which she knew as a bride she should be expected to attend; (in her secret heart Lizzie wished her husband had belonged to a somewhat less elevated class of society;) and the latter would be wild with childish joy at all they could show her in London, and spend a gayer holiday than had ever yet fallen to her lot.

How pleasant it was in the midst of her own great happiness, to have the power of conferring a little happiness on those beloved ones whom, in leaving, she had made so sorrowful and heavy of heart.

“But won’t we enjoy ourselves together now!” thought Lizzie, as she paced up and down the sunny room, or stood at the window gazing absently into the already busy streets. “Won’t I make dear Sarah merry again, and force her to confess that my husband is worthy of even *her* esteem? And won’t little Kitty open her wide blue eyes at the sights I shall be so delighted to show her;

and won't dear mama be glad when they go home and tell her how very, very happy they found me !"

The young wife closed her own bright eyes in pure ecstasy at the many charming visions her imagination was conjuring up, and when she opened them again it was to see her husband standing with an amused expression on his very handsome face, beside her.

"Little rustic!" he said, as Lizzie started and then nestled closely into the arms that were promptly extended to embrace her, "you will persist in getting up at daybreak; and by the time rational people are stirring you are ready to go to sleep again. For once I have caught you at it."

"Oh, Frederick!" she replied with a beaming face, "I was never less inclined to sleep in my life. I was only thinking how very, very happy I am."

"That's right, my pretty one—you are pleased with your new house, then?"



Pleased with her new house! Lizzie had estimated this, on its own account, just about as much as she had estimated the contents of that vast array of boxes which had stood in the passage at home on her marriage morning.

"It is all perfect, Frederick," she said, "but my happiness has a deeper source than that. It certainly would not have been less had you taken me to a cottage worth thirty pounds a year. Don't you believe me?"

"As I believe in all fair and beauteous things," Frederick answered lightly; "but, my darling, won't you ring for breakfast? the air of my native land has given me an appetite, and I am curious to see what our new cook can do for us."

Lizzie rang the bell.

"Not a bad room this, for London," resumed Frederick, as his wife returned to his side, "and they have managed to rig it out very decently. Nothing can exceed the good taste of a first-class London upholsterer. I

shall send this same fellow down to Pengarthen Hall before we make a move in that direction. You like your flowers, Lizzie?"

"They are delicious. I have been absolutely gloating over them. How kind of you to remember my love of flowers, Frederick."

"Nonsense, it's the right thing in London, to suffocate one's self with hothouse flowers. There will be plenty more coming in by and bye, for the conservatory upstairs."

"How delightful! I shall so enjoy arranging them. I need not go out this morning; need I, dear?"

"Yes; I think you need, if only for the sake of preserving those blush roses on your cheeks, Lizzie. What should you stay at home for?"

Lizzie was about to mention her wish of writing to her sister, when the breakfast made its appearance, and Mr. Leonard, who had a most fastidious appetite, was too busy for the next ten minutes in deciding what he should

take, and after he had taken it, in making up his mind as to the degree of skill employed in its preparation, to remember that he had asked his wife a question.

"After all, there's nothing like the French *cuisine*," he exclaimed suddenly, as Lizzie's little white hand was stretched out for his coffee cup. "You may pay a French cook what you like in this country, but you'll never get things served up as they are in Paris. What are you eating, Lizzie?"

"Bread and butter," replied Lizzie, laughing, for she was really amused at her husband's serious way of speaking about cookery—to her such an utterly insignificant subject, "I never take anything else for breakfast."

"You are wrong not to do so, especially rising at the unnatural hours you do. Try a cutlet, they are very decently flavoured, I assure you."

"Thank you, dear, I have had all I require. I want to tell you now one of my reasons for asking to stay at home to-day."

"True, I had forgotten; what is it, little one?"

"I want to write to Sarah, to beg her and Kitty to come to me as soon as they can. You know we have not quite six weeks to be in London."

Frederick's countenance changed as his wife spoke. To less loving eyes than those so earnestly gazing at him, it might have appeared to darken unpleasantly. His wife only wondered a little that he did not immediately reply to her, but waited in full confidence of receiving a cheerful acquiescence in her demand. Presently he roused himself and said:—

"Do you think they will come? that is, do you feel sure that your invitation is all that is wanted to bring them?"

Lizzie's eyes expressed far more surprise than her simple enquiry of—

"Whatever can you mean, Frederick?"

"I only mean," he said, rather quickly, and not looking at his wife as he spoke,

“that Miss Anstruther dislikes me quite enough to make it very possible that she may refuse to accept me as a host; and your mother would scarcely send Kitty alone.”

Lizzie’s sweet face expressed pain, though not half the pain she felt, at this allusion to a matter she had herself, in her new happiness of wifehood, nearly forgotten, namely, that old antipathy existing between her husband and her eldest sister.

“Dearest Frederick,” she exclaimed, rising abruptly, and placing both her hands caressingly and deprecatingly on his shoulders, “please to forget everything now, but that Sarah is your sister as well as mine, and that she and I love each other dearly.”

These were very early days, so Mr. Frederick Leonard kissed his young wife with a great deal of affection, put back the clustering curls that half shaded the tender, beseeching eyes, and told her that he would forget all she required him to forget, and remember everything she commanded him to remember.

“And I may write this morning, and say you join with me in hoping they will both come?”

“Certainly, my darling, my pretty Lisette; and at about two o'clock I shall return from my ramble to take you for a drive in the parks. Mind you put on your most becoming bonnet, and look your very best for the occasion.”

Lizzie was only too glad to promise anything to so good and kind a husband; and all that morning—while she wrote home, and when she was arranging the flowers in her conservatory, and finally, while employed in selecting the dress to appear in by and bye in the park—she sang, out of the exceeding joyousness of her heart, scraps of old familiar songs that brought the happy past in odd rivalry to the happier present very vividly before her.

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## CHAPTER V.

## NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

SARAH ANSTRUTHER wept many scorching tears—tears that even the anxious mother knew nothing of—over the letter that Lizzie had written in such exceeding gladness of heart; and yet of all who loved that young wife, there was not one who would more fervently and gratefully have rejoiced in the knowledge of her happiness than the poor, fond sister, whose own earthly happiness had been so early wrecked. Perhaps this circumstance, with the peculiar features attending it, had predisposed her to mistrust the durability of any state of exalted felicity, and tinged

with a morbid gloom all her lookings forward into life. Perhaps the heartless baseness of one man had inclined her to judge the whole sex too severely, and so Lizzie's husband, with all his external attractions and fascinations, had only come in for his due and inevitable share of her suspicion and dislike. But however this might be, she wept bitterly over her darling's letter, and there was a shadow of some unconquered pain still upon her face, when, at length she went to consult with Mrs. Anstruther upon the subject Lizzie had written about.

"Bless her innocent, precious heart!" exclaimed the impulsive mother, wiping her eyes as she returned the long, crossed epistle to Sarah—"how happy she seems, and how fondly she speaks of Frederick! I pray God you and I may have been mistaken in him after all. You will accept her invitation, of course, my love?"

"I came to ask your advice about it, mamma. I will go, if you think it best."



"Surely, I think it best, when our pretty Lizzie pleads so earnestly—and Kitty too—let her have you both."

"But you, dearest mamma—how will you bear being left quite alone? You never have been yet, you know; and you are so often dull and out of spirits lately."

"Dear, do not think of me for a moment. I shall not be dull if I can believe that my children are all happy together. I have been anxious about Lizzy for some time now; and then there is my poor boy—but the last accounts were so cheering, that I have felt glad and hopeful ever since; and now Lizzie's letter is so encouraging, that I shall be in danger of getting even too excited and frisky. Go to London, Sarah, by all means; and if you are still fearful of leaving me alone, I will ask one of the Clare girls to come and stay with me in your absence."

Thus the matter was decided; and the letter announcing the acceptance of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard's joint invitation to the two

sisters, went to London by that night's post.

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"They are coming, they are coming—they will be here on Friday!" exclaimed Lizzie, in a perfect fever of delight, meeting her husband one morning as he sauntered lazily, and at even a later hour than usual, into the breakfast-room—"isn't it delightful? isn't it good of dear Sarah to lose no time? I *must* stay at home to-day, Frederick, to superintend the arrangement of their room—there are fifty little things that I want to see to myself—you will let me off the water excursion, won't you?"

"Gently, gently, Lisette—you take a man's breath away by pouring such a shower of excitement upon him in the early morning. I am only half awake, my dear, and not at all up to the dish of enthusiasm you have prepared for me. Are there no letters for me, Lizzie?"

"Oh, yes," answered Lizzie, in a suddenly sobered voice, "there are three or four, I believe, Frederick. I really beg your pardon for obtruding mine upon you first; but I did feel so very, very glad about Sarah's coming. You are not vexed with me?"

"Silly child!" he said, kissing her;—"as if it were in a man's nature to be vexed with such a dainty piece of perfection as yourself. I think you grow lovelier every day, Lizzie—but give me those letters of mine, and then let us have some breakfast. We must have the carriage round by eleven, you know."

"Not for me, dear—you must positively make my excuses to our friends for to-day. I want to go shopping, and to do a hundred things that nobody could do but myself.—Frederick!"

It was a quick, startled exclamation, and uttered in a tone of unfeigned alarm, and yet Mr. Frederick Leonard had not spoken a single word, and no ordinary looker-on could have detected anything beyond a slight con-

traction of that very white and handsome forehead, over which fell a few curls of dark chestnut hair, almost womanlike in its softness and beauty.

It is an indescribably painful moment to a young and adoring wife, when, for the first time, her husband—perhaps of a few weeks only—reminds her, by some unquestionable sign, that he *is* her husband, and that the charming relations of lover and mistress exist no longer. Some men do this rudely and abruptly, quite heedless of what the consequences to their poor, disenchanted brides may be; others take the same step with judgment and by slow degrees, and thus avoid any very painful or disastrous results; but there is a third class of men, who, in virtue of the tyranny of their natures, and the necessity which this evil spirit lays upon them to act the selfish despot whenever their sovereign will is actively opposed, *betray*, unconsciously, that they intend to be master, even while they would fain excite the same amount of

grateful, admiring worship that was yielded to the fond and passionate lover of so short a time ago.

Of this latter class was Lizzie's elegant husband; and when she paused suddenly in her pretty childish recapitulation of the reasons why she wished to be excused from joining the water party, it was because she read in the well-beloved face, looking into hers, something which told her very plainly that Mrs. Frederick Leonard—happy, honoured, and envied as she might be—was not to expect the privileges, nor count upon the blind and self-forgetting devotion accorded so gladly and willingly to Lizzie Anstruther.

Now there was never, perhaps, a woman in the world more capable of obeying, graciously and heartily, than Frederick Leonard's wife; and considering that, from her very babyhood, she had been the spoiled darling of all around her, there certainly never existed a woman with less self-will, or less self-assertion of any kind. It was not,

therefore, the sudden conviction of her husband's intending to control her, that frightened the colour out of her cheeks, and elicited that startled exclamation just recorded—it was the idea accompanying this, that the love she clung to, as to her very life, must somehow have suffered loss before such a look as Frederick's face now wore could have been directed towards her.

But happily the offending brow cleared almost as soon as Lizzie had discovered its ruffling, and, with a smile that proved Mr. Frederick Leonard to be a very accomplished as well as a very amiable gentleman, he seized his wife's hand, and led her gaily to her seat at the breakfast table.

“My dear child,” he said, asking no explanation of the abrupt ending of her speech, or of her sudden pronunciation of his name, “if you don't want me to look like an ogre again, you must never talk of spending voluntarily a long day away from me. Ah, Lisette, do you think if I had twenty brothers or

sisters coming, I should propose sending you out for eight or nine hours without me? Now make the coffee, dearest, and try never to wound me in the same manner again."

It is, of course easy for a woman to forgive any offence which is attributed to the love she has herself inspired. There are thousands of Lady Annes out of the pages of Shakespeare, and although Lizzie did not share the extreme personal vanity of Prince Edward's widow, she was quite as much alive to the charm of being adored unreasonably as that unfortunate heroine could have been. So Frederick's momentary scowl was forgiven, if not forgotten, and all thoughts of remaining away from the Richmond water party cheerfully abandoned, though this entailed the necessity of entrusting to her French maid those hundred and one little commissions, in connection with the adornment of her sisters' room, which Lizzie would have been so childishly delighted to execute herself.

The party, however, of which Frederick

Leonard's young bride was the chief ornament, turned out a great success. Everybody happened to be in a good temper; there was no rain, and the summer sun shone gloriously on the gaily-freighted boats as they floated down the smooth river between those green-wooded banks, which are certainly unrivalled for their eternal freshness and beauty.

Lizzie enjoyed it all excessively, and if the thought now and then occurred to her that she should have enjoyed it still more had she and her husband been alone, the weakness must be pardoned in a very young, romantic girl, whose idol is still upon its lofty pedestal, and who has not yet learnt to esteem

"The homage of a thousand hearts,"

half so highly as the

"Fond, deep love of *one*."

Frederick Leonard, though evidently an immense favorite with the ladies—as what man with a handsome face and fascinating manners is not?—paid little attention to any-



body except his charming wife, who was thus spared the idle compliments and gallantries of the other gentlemen of the party. Some of them smiled amongst themselves, and said, in allusion probably to the husband's devotedness, that there was no fear of *that* lasting, and that by and bye their turn would come; but one whom Frederick had introduced carelessly to Lizzie as a sort of connection of the family—a Mr. Alleyne—answered these foolish and unprincipled men rebukingly, and told them they must be short-sighted indeed, if they could not discover something in Mrs. Leonard, which separated her entirely from the class of vain women whom their flatteries and idle love-making had succeeded in reaching.

“Hear him, hear him, hear the oracle!” exclaimed half-a-dozen voices, mockingly, “he knows he shall have a better chance than any of us of doing the amiable to this brilliant beauty, and so he would defy us to interfere with him.”

Robert Alleyne replied only by a look to these reckless talkers, but it sufficed to make them silent on the subject of Mrs. Frederick Leonard, whenever he was within ear shot, for the remainder of the day."

"I am glad," said Lizzie, innocently, as she and her husband were driving home together in the cool, delicious evening, "I am glad that Mr. Alleyne is related to us. I like him better than anyone you have yet introduced to me."

"What do you like him for?" asked Frederick a little quickly, "I see nothing in him but a vast deal of pride and self-sufficiency. It's odd that you should pick out for an especial favourite a fellow I have always had a marked distaste for."

"Oh, but," replied Lizzie, smiling, "I have not picked him out at all, dear. I only thought he had a pleasant, good face, and that his conversation was less—what shall I say?—less trifling and frivolous than that of the majority of his companions. If you

really dislike him, I am quite ready to believe I have been mistaken in him."

"That is not having a high opinion of your own judgment at any rate, Lizzie. I do dislike this man, and I never want to be intimate with him. Thank heaven he is not related, but only connected very distantly with us. Did I not tell you that he is a son of my charming stepmother down in Cornwall? She was a widow when my poor silly old father married her, you know."

"No, indeed, you did not tell me this, Frederick. But how then can you avoid being intimate with him? Does he never visit his mother when you are at Pengarthen Hall?"

"Pretty often, I believe, but we don't come in contact. Madam Leonard has her separate establishment, you may be very sure.—And so this is the only man you have yet taken a fancy to, Lisette! What of the women?"

"Oh, really I have talked so little to any of them that I have no right to give an opinion;

and then, you see, Frederick, I have not been used to fashionable people. The Clares, your friends at Linden Park, are about the most fashionable I have hitherto had anything to do with, and even they have a refreshing country simplicity of manner which none of these people possess. I don't think I should like to live amongst them all the year round; should you, dear?"

"Perhaps not—*Cela dépend*. Don't you rather admire that aristocratic looking widow, Mrs. Lumley Rogers, who sat by me in our boat to-day?"

"Oh, yes, I had quite forgotten her for the moment. She is a most interesting person certainly, and not in the least affected or artificial. Without being decidedly pretty, her face is singularly attractive; and even in speaking what a lovely voice she has."

"I am glad she impressed you favourably," Frederick replied, "for she told me she had taken an amazing fancy to you, and I have

asked her to come and spend a month with us in Cornwall."

"That will be very nice," Lizzie said, wondering for a moment whether all the guests they were ever to have would be invited by her husband. "Did she accept at once?"

"It amounted to the same thing; she said she must come in one morning and talk to you about it. Of course I understood the matter to be settled."

"Certainly," Lizzie answered, meekly; and then Mr. Leonard gave his horses the whip, and the quiet parts of the road from Richmond being exchanged for the busy thoroughfares of Knightsbridge and Piccadilly, no more conversation took place between the husband and wife until their arrival at home, when Lizzie felt sufficiently tired to go to bed at once, and Mr. Leonard made a great merit of sitting up for an hour to answer the letters he had barely given himself time to read in the morning.

## CHAPTER VI.

## FREDERICK'S LETTERS.

ONE of the letters that Frederick Leonard sat up to answer that night was from his father's widow, Mrs. Leonard, down at Pengarthen Hall. She did not often trouble her unloving step-son with written communications, but in the present instance her excuse for so doing was a very good one; something had occurred which she deemed it essential to make known to the individual whom it chiefly concerned; and Mrs. Leonard, senior, was rather given to act upon a straightforward principle, without very much considering whether she

was making herself agreeable or the reverse, by what she did.

The case was simply this :—A man of the name of Ash, had for some years occupied one of the largest farms on Mr. Leonard's estate. He had been generally industrious and prosperous, as was supposed, and at all events quite ready with his rent every quarter-day ; but he was a reserved, surly kind of a man, and none of the neighbours liked him, or had much to say to his equally distant wife and grown-up daughters. For nearly a twelve-month past, things had begun to go badly at the farm in question, and Mr. Leonard's steward had several times complained of the difficulty he had in getting the rent from Ash.

For the last two quarters he had got none ; and now, in accordance with general instructions received from the owner of the estate, he had given the man notice to quit—a notice that Ash, with some harsh words and defiant expressions, had absolutely refused to take. Upon the steward's threatening him with

ejection, he had hastened to the Hall and demanded an interview with Mrs. Leonard, who, though known to have little or no influence with her step-son, was very highly esteemed amongst the tenantry, and frequently appealed to in cases wholly out of her power to meddle with. In the present instance, however, Jabez Ash came to ask no favour—he was a man who boasted that he had never asked a favour of any one in his life—he came simply to request Mrs. Leonard to obtain from her step-son an immediate revocation of the notice he had received from the steward—the farm suited him well enough, he said, and he had no mind to give it up.

“Then, of course” Mrs. Leonard had suggested, “you will be prepared by next quarter-day with the rent and its arrears—I may add this to the rather singular message you wish me to deliver to your landlord?”

“That may or may not be,” the man had replied in a dogged tone ; “you’ve no call to mention the rent in any way.”



Mrs. Leonard was about to enquire on what possible grounds he could demand permission to remain in the farm, when Ash had again spoken, this time moving towards the door as he did so :

“My daughter Leah, wanted me to ask you if there was any sort of a place up here at the Hall as she could have. The girl’s tired of living at home, having been brought up a bit above the rest of her family ; and she thought as there’s a new missus coming there’d like to be more women folk wanted about the house. You’ll be kind enough to let her know if room can be made for her ; it’s no concern of mine, this, but I promised her to speak about it.”

Mrs. Leonard was allowed no opportunity of sending back any message to Leah Ash in reply to her petition, for the father having now finished all he had come to say, wished Mrs. Leonard good morning, and made a precipitate retreat. In her letter to her step-son, she offered not a single comment on the intel-

ligence she conveyed to him, only begging that immediate instructions might be sent down either to the steward or herself. In reference to Leah she merely said: "I am not aware of any post in your wife's establishment which this girl would be fitted to occupy, and, as you know, the entire staff of domestic servants has been, according to your own instructions, already chosen."

Frederick Leonard had another letter from his steward on the same subject; but that he put aside with an impatient exclamation, and sat for at least half-an-hour reading and re-reading the one from his step-mother, his handsome face darkening more and more, and assuming an expression that his happy Lizzie up stairs would have broken her heart even to dream of, in connection with the husband she trusted as wholly as she loved.

At length Mr. Leonard seized a pen, filled it with the blackest ink, and wrote two very brief letters. The first, to his steward, commanded him to leave Ash and his farm alone;

the second, to Mrs. Leonard, in somewhat more courteous language requested her to engage the girl Leah as housekeeper, and to discharge (on any moderate terms of indemnification) the woman already hired in that capacity.

These duties accomplished, the owner of the Pengarthen estate rang for brandy and water, smoked two or three cigars, and then, with a tolerably cleared brow, went lazily to bed—to dream, we will hope, only of his fond and innocent Lizzie.

Nothing occurred during the next two days to interfere with Mrs. Frederick Leonard's bright anticipations in reference to her sisters' arrival; and on Friday evening, she had the happiness of clasping them both in her arms, and assuring them that her felicity was now quite perfect.

"You are looking well, darling," said Sarah, after having, by a prolonged gaze into the beloved face, satisfied herself that there was no deception in this fair appearance.

"Mr. Leonard has certainly so far merited our warmest thanks for taking such good care of you."

"Oh, don't call him Mr. Leonard, dear Sarah," pleaded the wife, a little reproachfully; "call him Frederick—he is as much your brother-in-law, now, as he is my husband."

"Why isn't your husband at home, Lizzie?" asked pert Miss Kitty, shaking out her sunny curls, and looking very like Lizzie in miniature—"mamma said he would come to the station to meet us."

"He will be in presently, dear child," replied Lizzie, stooping to give another kiss to the little privileged chatter-box; "gentlemen in London have more engagements than you have any notion of, Miss Kit. I daresay, however, we shall find time between us to take you to see everything there is worth seeing. Sarah, love, we dine at seven. I will leave you now, for half an hour, and send my maid to help you both."

"You are not expecting company this evening, Lizzie, are you?"

"Not expecting any, certainly, dear, but Frederick often brings in a friend or two without giving me notice. You will be sure to dress nicely, Sarah—you always do—and just see that Kitty has one of her prettiest frocks on, and that Isaure arranges her hair tastefully."

Sarah promised with her grave smile to attend to these hints; and then Mrs. Leonard left her sisters to perform the duties of her own toilet, and to be made as attractive as possible for the eyes which still delighted in her beauty, and esteemed her, as indeed she was, the fairest thing they had ever looked upon.

Frederick Leonard came in alone about ten minutes before the dinner hour. He received his new relatives very politely, if not very cordially, apologized to his wife for being rather late, and on this account spent a considerably shorter time than usual in his

dressing-room. On the announcement of dinner he walked up to Sarah and seemed about to offer his arm, but a sudden thought striking him he turned to the other two sisters and said—

“Scarcely fair, though, to separate Miss Anstruther and you, Lizzie, the first day, so I will take charge of this small lady,” possessing himself of Kitty’s hand, “and follow you into the dining room. I like to do an unselfish thing when I can.”

Lizzie must have known pretty well that no great merit attached to her husband’s present performance, but only Sarah could estimate the full irony of the speech that accompanied it. Her countenance did not change, however, and if the tender pressure of the arm that had been instantly slid through her own, was in any way suggestive, Lizzie was not likely to understand it in a manner calculated to affect her peace of mind in the very slightest degree.

Mr. Leonard discharged the duties of a host—as far, at least, as these consist in pressing upon one's guests every good thing at table—very creditably, and if he did not attempt to mingle often in the conversation, it might be supposed that he abstained from a kindly motive, under the impression that the re-united sisters would naturally have abundance to say to each other about family matters, and prefer their own little gossip to subjects of more general interest. The same reason might have been urged as an excuse for his leaving the trio immediately after the coffee had been served in the drawing-room, and not appearing at home again until Sarah and Kitty—tired from their rather long journey—had gone to bed.

Assuredly for this one night he was not much missed even by his adoring Lizzie, who, thoroughly happy in having her sisters with her, and in letting them see how happy she was, forgot all about the time, and was as-

tonished beyond measure when Sarah—pale an hour ago—took out her watch and announced that it was past eleven.

“Well,” said Lizzie, “it was really very thoughtful and good of Frederick to give us this one evening quite to ourselves; we must not expect such a treat again, for he is much too indolent in general to care for going out after dinner; and, indeed, one or other of his bachelor friends is pretty sure to drop in, even if we dine alone. I am so very glad we have escaped for this evening.”

“So am I, darling,” replied Sarah, as she gave her beautiful sister a last kiss; “but I do not despair of having the same pleasure again. Your husband can afford to be a little generous towards us occasionally, since you now belong to him for ever.”

“I wish she didn’t,” called out Kitty, who had been erroneously supposed asleep at the other end of the room; “but I don’t mean to tell you why, if you both ask me ever so.”



"Which there is no fear of our doing," exclaimed Sarah, striving to cover the sudden distress that she felt her face was showing by a rebuking look at the incorrigible little Kitty; "the fancies of small children are much too insignificant to trouble older heads, and you will do well, young lady, to remember that you are for the present a guest in Mr. Leonard's house."

"I do," said Kitty, pouting as spoiled children are apt to pout when reproved ever so mildly; "and I mean to be very polite, indeed, to Lizzie's husband. You are not angry with me, Lizzie?"

"No, you silly little thing," laughed the happy wife, whose perfect confidence was not to be shaken by such a very small puff of wind as this. "I am not in the least angry, Kitty; but I shall be wofully disappointed if by the time your visit is over you do not tell me that you love your new brother dearly."

"Come to bed, Kitty," said Sarah, pre-

venting any further reply, "and learn to control that troublesome tongue of yours, or your love will not be worth anybody's caring about."

"How strange that they should all of them dislike my husband," thought Lizzie, as she watched her sisters disappearing up the stairs; but the knowledge that they did so was not new to her, and it only served now, as it had always served before, to make her cling more fondly and tenderly to him.

\* As for making her question his worthiness, the very idea was too absurd to enter her head for a single moment. So she only uttered a little sigh over the perversity of her mistaken family, and sat down amongst her flowers to await the beloved one's return.

## CHAPTER VII.

## KITTY IN DANGER.

WHEN, for nearly a week after the arrival of her sisters, Lizzie found that her husband absented himself every evening, and that he was also rarely at home during the day, she ventured to express her regret that he should think such a course at all necessary, and hinted that, notwithstanding her own firm conviction of his motive being a kind one, it certainly began to look like a bad compliment to Sarah :

“ You should have said you missed me before, Lisette,” replied the husband, lightly ;  
“ I really thought you and your sisters were

too happy together to care whether I was with you or not. You have been taking the young one about everywhere, have you not?"

"Oh, yes—we have had no lack of amusement or enjoyment either; but still you must know, dearest, that mine would have been increased a thousandfold had you been with us; and, let me tell you, that 'young one,' as you call her, little Miss Kitty, has her eyes very widely opened. She is continually asking why you are so seldom at home, and if it is because you don't like Sarah and herself."

"A very promising young lady, indeed," said Mr. Leonard, laughing; "you may assure her that I never yet had the bad taste to dislike anything so bewitchingly pretty as Miss Catherine Anstruther. I will make peace with my small relative, Lisette, by taking her for a drive in the Park to-day. Those new ponies I have just bought are very quiet, and Kitty will look remarkably attractive

in your little shell of a carriage, leaning back, as I am sure she will, with that queenly air of hers which is so piquante in a child of her age. Let her be carefully got up by Isaure, and ready for me at three o'clock."

"Thank you, dear," Lizzie said; but her tone not perhaps expressing very ardent gratitude, Frederick looked into her face inquiringly.

"Am I not a good boy, now, Lizzie? I thought my proposal would have delighted you."

"I am really very much obliged to you," the wife replied, "for offering to take either of my sisters out with you, but you must not be angry if I say that it would have given me more pleasure had you offered to take Sarah."

"Take Sarah!"

The tone in which those two words were spoken was strikingly suggestive, had Lizzie only understood it. She understood certainly that it expressed a strong distaste for what she had hinted at, but beyond this her

penetration was quite at fault. Mr. Leonard, who had really not intended to be quite so sincere, was quick to perceive the look of pain upon his wife's fair brow.

"Dearest Lisette," he said, drawing her to him and attempting to kiss away the shadow as fond mothers when their children have been hurt, "kiss the place to make it well;" "dearest Lisette, I did not mean to offend you, or to be disrespectful to your sister. Sarah cannot help being plain anymore than I can help having quite a morbid shrinking from ugly women. Let us talk about something else."

Easy words for a man to utter, and by no means an uncommon method with persons not used to contradiction or annoyance of getting out of a difficulty—but unwise, too, if they really value the peace of mind or the good opinion of those they would thus put off, since a single heedless or unkind sentence brooded upon in secret, assumes an importance, and provokes a bitterness that might

never have belonged to it had it been freely discussed at the time of its being spoken.

Lizzie had trodden upon the first really sharp thorn in that brilliant path of roses to which her union with the man she loved had introduced her. But though the tender flesh bled from the wound—as young flesh will bleed until it becomes hardened from constant laceration—she obeyed instinctively her husband's wish to drop the subject, and after a little more soothing caressing on his part, cleared her brow as carefully as she could of every lingering shadow, and again promised to have Kitty in readiness at three o'clock for the high honour to which she was destined.

Mrs. Lumley Rogers called that morning and was introduced to Miss Anstruther. Lizzie watched anxiously to see if her sister's plainness (*she* had never thought her plain) was productive of any repelling effect on this attractive and seemingly amiable lady. When she found that the very reverse appeared to be the case, that Mrs. Rogers turned

even from her to listen with manifest interest to the few quiet, unconventional words spoken by her intelligent sister, Lizzie's warm heart opened at once and for ever to the agreeable widow, and before they parted she had cordially seconded the invitation already given by her husband, and even prayed Mrs. Rogers to be early in joining them at Pengarthen Hall, so that they might have her for a little while quite to themselves—a pleasure there would be little hope of when other guests arrived.

“Don't you like her very much, Sarah?” was the younger sister's eager question, as they walked together later in the day, in the cool, wooded part of Kensington Gardens.

“I feel strongly attracted towards her,” was Sarah's rather cautious reply; “but you know, Lizzie darling, I never could take fancies to people, or form friendships with them quite so rapidly as you do.”

“No, I know!” Lizzie replied; and her thoughts immediately reverted to a time not very remote when this prudent Sarah had



vainly tried to persuade her that a certain gentleman was not necessarily a model of all excellence, because his face and form were faultless, and his manners distinguished by that winning gentleness which most women find irresistible.

Of course, Sarah had been wrong. As a wife so wholly beloved Lizzie would have deemed it treason to hold any other opinion. Frederick was all that a man could be—until to-day she had believed him a little raised above humanity. It had hurt her sorely to discover a single weakness in him, the tiniest flaw in her burnished idol; but that he was her idol still, the very pain he had the power to give her, abundantly testified; and like a good, true wife, she resolved to put from her every shadow of a thought that could do him the lightest wrong, and to love him even the more, if she could, that he was not so wholly perfect as she had childishly deemed him.

“Yes, I know,” she had said, in answer to

Sarah's observation on the facility with which she could take people into her heart—and then followed the rapid train of thought just recorded, at the conclusion of which, her sister remaining silent, Lizzie added:—

“But I am sure I am not mistaken in this instance, Sarah. Mrs. Lumley Rogers has too open and candid a face to be otherwise than a good, true-hearted woman. Frederick likes her excessively.”

“Does he know her intimately?” Sarah added.

“No, I believe not. I think they once met at some country house in Cornwall. It was her cleverness that attracted him to her—intellectual originality, he calls it. I suppose she does not think it worth her while to waste her mental powers upon a girl like me, for she always talks simply and pleasantly enough, just as other people talk, when I am with her. I wish very much sometimes that I had read and studied more, when I had plenty of time to do so.”

"Dear Lizzie—it is not yet too late. I think every wife should endeavour as much as possible to reach towards her husband's standard of intelligence. Mr. Leonard, though habitually too indolent to show it, is a man of decided intellect, and consequently very certain to appreciate mental gifts in others. You are yourself far from deficient, but we have all conspired to spoil you a little bit, I am afraid, and so your education, to all solid intents and purposes, has in reality been scarcely begun. Try to make up for it, Lizzie, when you get into the country. Read good, useful books, not novels or poetry, and take every opportunity of associating with persons whose minds are more cultivated than your own."

"Mrs. Lumley Rogers, for instance," said Lizzie, with a smile.

"I don't know yet whether I shall entirely agree in your estimate of this lady, Lizzie. I like what I have seen of her, but I dare not judge of anyone in a single interview. And

you must always remember, dear child, that intellectual superiority is by no means a guarantee for moral worth."

"Oh, Sarah, darling!" exclaimed the younger sister, with sudden enthusiasm, "if I could only have you with me always, I should be quite, quite happy, and you could teach me everything I require to know. Will you and Frederick never learn to love each other?"

"It is so hard to me to do otherwise than love whatever is dear to you, Lizzie," replied Sarah, with grave tenderness, as she looked into her sister's bright young face, "that there is no saying what I may learn to do by and bye. Let us sit down here, darling, and enjoy the cool breeze from the water. I am so glad and thankful when I have you, as I have had you this afternoon, entirely to myself."

And in spite of the little cloud of the morning, Lizzy felt very glad and happy too on this sweet summer day, basking in that atmosphere of perfect love which from her very birth had always surrounded her.

In the meanwhile, Miss Kitty greatly enjoyed her drive amongst the gay people in the park with her handsome brother-in-law, whose short-comings were for the present forgotten in consideration of the trouble he took to amuse the little lady by his side, and to atone for his previous neglect of her.

"My wife's sister," he said, introducing her to the different acquaintances they met—"a young lady who three or four years hence will scarcely care to be driven by her brother-in-law. Ah, Erskine," (to a tall, handsome man, who suddenly reined up his horse by Mr. Leonard's carriage) "how long have you been in town, and what is the best news from Cornwall?"

"That the master and mistress of Pengarthen Hall are coming to put a little life into us by and bye," returned the gentleman gaily. "I arrived in this part of the world yesterday, and was thinking of looking you up to-day. Shall I, do you think, be welcome?"

"To myself always, but,"—in a lowered

voice—"an old acquaintance of yours is just now staying with us, whom you would scarcely care to meet—my wife's eldest sister."

"The powers forbid that I should come, then," exclaimed the young man with a quick rush of blood to his face—"but how in the name of patience can you stand—"

"Hush, hush, you shameless sinner," laughed Frederick, "and let me introduce you to my fair young friend here—Miss Catherine Anstruther—the Honourable Edward Erskine."

Kitty smiled and blushed very prettily, and the Honourable Edward bowed with as much ceremony as if he were doing homage to a princess; but he was evidently not inclined for any further conversation, so, with a hasty good morning, he touched his horse, and was soon lost amidst the crowd.

"Now, Kitty," said her companion in his most persuasive accents, "I am going to put

your good sense and discretion to the test. I am going to ask you not to mention Mr. Erskine at home in any way. Some time, perhaps, I may explain to you my reasons for making this request; but at present you must trust me wholly. Will you oblige me so far, my little sister?"

Now Kitty was by no means of a deceitful or secretive disposition naturally, but she had been too much accustomed to talk with and listen to her mother's servants; and this had certainly lowered the tone of her mind, as such things invariably do, and predisposed it to receive erroneous notions of right and wrong. Her vanity, too, was flattered by the confidential manner in which her brother-in-law addressed her, and he had little difficulty in inducing her to promise all he required.

On their way home Mr. Leonard stopped at a jeweller's and bought Kitty a handsome gold chain with a locket attached to it. This was the crowning stroke of diplomacy which

quite settled the matter of the young lady's allegiance, and, dating from that day, Frederick Leonard was no longer without a warm friend and advocate amongst the otherwise unpropitious members of his wife's family.



## CHAPTER VIII.

ROBERT ALLEYNE.

"I HAVE invited a gentleman to dinner, Lisette," said Frederick, entering his wife's dressing-room that same evening; "and as I have done it to please you, rather than myself, I expect you to be duly grateful. Can you guess who it is?"

"No, dear; how should I? Is there a gentleman in the world, besides Mr. Frederick Leonard, whom I feel the least interest in seeing? Tell me who it is."

"That fascinating connection of ours whom you took such a fancy to, the other day, at

Richmond—Robert Alleyne; don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly; and I am very glad. I really liked him, and I want Sarah to know him."

"Ah, I have no doubt they will get on famously together; I thought so when I invited him; but he is not a marrying man, Lisette, so don't set your little heart upon anything of that sort."

"Oh, Frederick—you are not really serious—you cannot think so meanly, so contemptibly of me as that."

And Lizzie's sweet, pure eyes, looked almost inclined to overflow at her husband's thoughtless observation.

"Don't be a goose, child," he said, somewhat quickly, "all women are fond of match-making if it comes in their way; and there would be no great crime in your wishing to meet with a suitable husband for your eldest sister. If Alleyne was a marrying

man he might not object to her unfortunate plainness, for he goes in for sanctity, I believe—but he's too spooney upon his mother still, to care about a wife; and then he is only at present a hard-working barrister. Lisette! what in the name of patience are you crying about?"

The tears had really come at last, and they were flowing pretty rapidly when Frederick first detected them.

"It is so stupid of me," said poor Lizzie, apologetically, and wiping away the offending drops as fast as they appeared, "but it hurts me to hear Sarah spoken of unkindly, or even slightly. You cannot know how good, and true, and noble-minded she is—how far above other women in everything. I don't think there is a man in the whole world worthy of her," (Lizzie grew warmer as she went on) "and the very idea of looking out for, or trying to catch a husband for Sarah, would be, beyond measure, revolting

to me, and insulting to her. Do, dear, forgive me for speaking so to you, and try to think better of us both."

Frederick Leonard had never seen his beautiful young wife look indignant or excited before, and whatever temptation he might feel to resent the manner in which she had received his observations, he was constrained for the moment to express nothing but admiration at the increase of loveliness her heightened colour and sparkling eyes imparted to her.

"I shall be strongly tempted to make you angry again, Lisette," he said, "if you always look as beautiful under excitement; but for the present we will sign a treaty of peace, as you ought to be dressed for dinner. Come, pretty one, kiss me, and forgive me for not discovering charms in any other woman in the world except yourself."

Lizzie was still too much in love with her husband, still too entirely persuaded of his limitless love for her, to be very hard to

appease under any form of provocation she would be likely in these early days to encounter, so they kissed and "made it up" in the most approved style, and then separated to go through the duties of their respective toilets, and to meet, with looks of renewed affection, half-an-hour later, in the drawing-room.

Robert Alleyne was the only guest that day. He was a grave, quiet man, of about thirty, with a face that the most casual observer would pronounce to be singularly agreeable, and what romantic young ladies would certainly declare excessively interesting, not because he had pale cheeks and dark eyes, but because of something in the habitual expression of his countenance which spoke of suffering either in the past or present, and a resigned acceptance of this that few men of strong will and impetuous natures ever attain unto. Yet strong will, and very ardent feeling were clearly imprinted on every feature of Robert Alleyne's face. His manner

towards his host, though undeniably courteous, was marked by a reserve that struck Lizzie as the more extraordinary that to her and her sisters he was frank and open in the extreme. He talked to them of his mother, and of Pengarthen and its neighbourhood, two subjects in which he was evidently intensely interested, and on which he became—quiet, sober man though he was—eloquent and enthusiastic to a curious degree.

“You will like the wild sea coast, and the black rocks, and the utterly original scenery around your new home,” he said, addressing himself particularly to Lizzie—“and I think the quaint simplicity and the honest heartedness of the people—fishermen and their families chiefly—will have a charm for you, as they have always had for my mother. To her there is no place in the world to be compared to Pengarthen. Are you in general fond of the sea?”

“Very much so,” Lizzie replied, rather absently, for she was at the moment wonder-

ing how Mrs. Leonard could be so entirely beloved and venerated by her own son, and so despised and disliked by her step-son, the latter being, in the fond wife's opinion, almost as incapable of judging harshly as he was of acting wrongly. And yet there was something in Robert Alleyne that forbade the idea of his weakly clinging to an unworthy object, however close might be the ties between them. But then "love is blind," decided poor Lizzie in her very natural perplexity, forgetting that the blindness in this case was much more likely to be her own, and that Frederick had really been unable to bring a single definite charge against his father's widow, except that she was puritanical, and altogether displeasing to him personally.

When Lizzie roused herself from her cogitations on the subject, to give a more polite attention to Mr. Alleyne's agreeable conversation, she found that he had succeeded in exciting Sarah's interest in the matter of Cornish scenery and Cornish fishermen, and

that the two were really getting on, as Frederick had half ironically predicted, famously together.

"You don't smoke, I believe, Alleyne," said Mr. Leonard, when, after coffee had been served in the drawing-room, there was a question as to how the remainder of the evening was to be disposed of—"otherwise those leads out there on a warm night like this serve not badly for the purpose. I am going to look at the stars, or the crimson sunset, or something equally romantic, for half-an-hour. Shall I leave you to the ladies?"

"I don't smoke often," replied the gentleman thus addressed, "but I will keep you company for ten minutes, if you will allow me. Stars and crimson sunsets are good to look at sometimes, particularly from the leads of a fashionable mansion in Piccadilly."

He spoke with a smile upon his lips, which for all its sweetness—and Robert Alleyne's smile was very sweet—met no response on the countenance of his host. Evidently Mr.



Frederick Leonard was not anxious for a companion in his astronomical observations, or it might be—so, at least, it struck Sarah Anstruther—that this companion was especially distasteful to him. She watched a little curiously to see how it would end.

“My good fellow,” said Frederick, with an assumption of careless ease, “pray don’t make so great a sacrifice on my account. The ladies, too, will owe me a grudge if I am even the innocent means of taking so entertaining a companion away from them. Lisette, speak out and tell your friend in your own and your sister’s names, that you cannot possibly spare him.”

Before Lizzie could reply, which she would have done in accordance with her husband’s wishes, Robert Alleyne had again spoken.

“Mrs. Leonard will be the first to pardon my temporary absence, when she knows that just for the ten minutes I propose being away, I shall be thinking even more of her than if I remained seated by her side—and what

young wife in Christendom ever resented the fact of her husband's society being preferred to her own?"

He still smiled pleasantly and spoke lightly, but his manner was quietly decided, and Frederick (perhaps because as a host good breeding forbade any further resistance) yielded with a tolerable grace, and led the way out of the conservatory window.

When they were gone, the sisters fell to talking about their new friend, and exchanging in very womanly fashion their opinions respecting him. Lizzie, with her usual impulsiveness, declared him charming altogether, and hoped they should see a great deal of him.

Kitty, whose head you must remember had been not a little turned by the excitements of the afternoon, said if ever she married she would like just such a man as Robert Alleyne for a husband; and Sarah, with a very gentle rebuke to her young sister for speaking foolishly, acknowledged that caution itself had

every temptation to lay down its arms when judgment concerning this undeniably good man was in question.

"I saw him before Sarah," exclaimed Kitty, upon whose juvenile mind sisterly rebukes were not wont to make a great impression, and whose reticence in the matter of Mr. Erskine was costing her no inconsiderable effort. "He was riding on a beautiful black horse, with two or three other gentlemen and a lady, who spoke first to Mr. Leonard and then to me. She said she had been to see you both this morning, and that I was the image of Lizzie, and Mr. Alleyne said so too, and after that he asked if we should be at home this evening, and Frederick (I am always to call Mr. Leonard Frederick, now) told him we dined at seven, and he had better come to dinner. I think the lady wanted to be invited as well, for she said he was a very fortunate man to have invitations without ceremony to such a delightful circle; but Frederick only smiled at her, as he used to

smile at Lizzie when he first came to see us at home ; and then they all rode on. I remember now—the lady's name was Lumley ; do you know her much, Lizzie ?”

“ It was Mrs. Lumley Rogers, Kitty, and I know her at present only a little. Sarah dear, are you too tired to sing to-night ?”

“ Not if it will amuse you, Lizzie.”

And Sarah, who had one of those sweet, low, dream-like voices, that all persons of feeling naturally love, went to the piano and began singing some of the old favourite airs that she knew her sister cared most to hear.

Lizzie did care for them exceedingly, but to-night she was restless and difficult to be entertained. After sitting by Sarah's side for awhile she got up and wandered into the conservatory, where the soft music followed her in dream-like murmurs as she bent, with an evidently preoccupied mind, over her beautiful flowers.

The door through which Frederick and his guest had passed on to the leads was closed

now, but the side windows of the conservatory were open, and though the gentlemen walked and smoked at some little distance, Lizzie could distinguish their voices from time to time, and the idea occurred to her that her husband's was more raised than a perfectly amicable discussion would have justified. That he did not like Robert Alleyne she knew very well, but that any cause of dispute existed between them, or, if it existed, could be brought up now in their relative positions of guest and host, she was most unwilling to believe.

Nevertheless, the fact became increasingly clear that they were both speaking with unusual earnestness, and that Frederick's tones were not unmixed with angry impatience, which the other appeared vainly endeavouring to soothe.

"I will go away," decided Lizzie, the moment that she became conscious of an intense desire to remain and hear what she could. "I have no right to be a spy upon my hus-

band, and perhaps he will tell me when Mr. Alleyne is gone what they have been disputing about."

Good little wife! she could have formed no more prudent resolve, but it cost her something to act upon it, especially as a few words met her ear while she delayed her steps for a moment to pluck a tempting sprig of Cape jessamine for Sarah.

The words were these, and it was her husband who spoke them:—

"Right or wrong, wise or unwise, I'm not the man to be dictated to. Leave me to manage my own affairs, and don't be alarmed for any consequences I may bring upon myself or others. I know pretty well those I have got to deal with, and if I didn't I shouldn't come to you to teach me. Life is so preciously tame at best, that it rather amuses me to watch the approach of a storm; to hear the thunder rattling in the distance. My little wife is an angel, but—"

"Hush, hush," interrupted Mr. Alleyne.

Perhaps he saw the glimmer of a white dress not far from them; but however that might be, Lizzie heard nothing more except the beating of her own heart as she hastened back into the drawing-room, and took her place again as quietly as she could behind the unconscious singer at the piano.

A few minutes later Robert Alleyne came in alone, and declaring himself a devoted admirer of the simple, unartistic kind of music Sarah was executing, sat down by Lizzie and talked very little more for the remainder of the evening.

Mr. Leonard did not join the party indoors for nearly an hour after his guest had deserted him, and then he appeared tired and out of spirits, and, stretching himself on a sofa, declared he must go to sleep.

Of course Mr. Alleyne took the hint, and departed, shaking each sister, Lizzie particularly, cordially by the hand, and leaving on all their minds an impression that was not likely soon to pass away.

Mrs. Frederick Leonard stayed awake that night till long after her usual hour of falling asleep, but she received from her husband no account of the conversation that had taken place outside the conservatory between himself and Robert Alleyne.



## CHAPTER IX.

## AN ATTRACTIVE WIDOW.

For a few days after Robert Alleyne's visit Lizzie went about with a thoughtful look that sometimes deepened into positive sadness, but on its becoming observed and wondered at by those around her, she shook off the signs of inward disquiet, and laboured bravely and successfully to convince all interested in the matter that nothing serious was amiss with her.

It pleased Mr. Leonard at this time to insist on his wife's accepting every invitation she received, and to force her into a round of gaiety that—as Sarah positively refused to

share it — was wholly distasteful to the younger sister. But Frederick said he could not bear to see his pretty darling looking out of spirits, that she wanted amusement, and that nothing was more gratifying to himself than to witness the admiration she excited, and to be told by his bachelor friends that he was the luckiest fellow in England.

In all this there was only one element which was productive of the slightest real enjoyment to Lizzie, and that was the continued affection which she believed to be plainly demonstrated by her husband's anxiety for her entertainment, mistaken though he was as to the means for ensuring it, and in his unabated delight in her society.

She loved him with a girl's first, passionate, unreflecting devotion; perhaps any man who had won her heart and become her husband would have been loved by her in an equal degree (I am not setting up this poor little wife as a heroine, or a remarkable woman at all); but Frederick Leonard standing in that

relation towards her, she could do no otherwise than continue to love him wholly and entirely, and to feel that on the duration of his love and faith to her hung something more than the happiness of a life.

So because it appeared to Lizzie that warm affection was the mainspring of Frederick's desire to take her about with him, she submitted with a sweetly smiling face, and acknowledged herself abundantly rewarded, if, during any of the long evenings they spent in society, he voluntarily sought her out, and said a few kind or tender words to her.

The time was not yet come to this simply educated country girl—child indeed in years—when general admiration, or the most brilliant conversation could win her even for an hour into forgetfulness of the one individual round whom all her innocent thoughts revolved.

A woman who is neither vain, nor intellectual, nor immoderately fond of dancing, has little chance of enjoying society for its own

sake, and as Lizzie was none of these—at present—she often caught herself wishing that her husband's tastes had been different, or that she had possessed a greater capacity for at once liking whatever he liked.

Amongst all her new and fashionable acquaintances, Mrs. Frederick Leonard was never tempted to make friends of any except Mrs. Lumley Rogers and Mr. Alleyne. The latter she met very rarely, and he came no more to the house in May Fair, but the former, being one of the petted lions of the exclusive circle in which the Leonards moved, was to be found nearly everywhere; and it often pleased her to turn capriciously from the choice *esprits* whom her wit and originality were delighting, to talk in some quiet corner to Frederick Leonard's simple little wife, on any foolish or amusing topic that passing events suggested. It was one of the rare gifts this attractive woman possessed to enter as fully and naturally into whatever interested inferior minds, as into the

largest and profoundest subjects her own taste and ambition led her to aim at grasping.

Lizzie was quite alive to the intellectual difference between them, and sincerely grateful to Mrs. Rogers for the friendship and the notice she so cordially and frankly bestowed upon her.

Frederick was no less pleased than his wife at the growing intimacy between the two ladies. His own admiration of Mrs. Rogers was always very reservedly expressed, and amongst the many men who surrounded and flattered her, he was the one who offered the smallest amount of public homage; ministered the least to the vanity which, it must be acknowledged, formed a part of this very charming widow's character.

"Do you know," she once said to Lizzie, "how all the women envy you your handsome husband—not alone because he is handsome—although in my estimation good looks go a great way—but because he is so gallantly

devoted to you—has no eyes nor ears for any other woman? If he were not a married man I should myself be piqued into trying to make an impression on him, but as it is, he is safe as far as I am concerned—the world I mix in has taught me a good many bad things, but not yet to meddle with my friends' husbands."

"Oh, I should think not," said Lizzie, with her innocent smile, for she took it all as a jest, "but why have you never married again yourself? I am sure you would have no difficulty in finding a husband to be as devoted to you as Frederick is to me."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Rogers, rather gravely, "I will tell you why. I married once for—well, we will call it ambition if you like, though it is far too dignified a term to express that weak hankering after a position in society which lead half the women in our class into such fatal mistakes. Suffice it now that I discovered mine to be a mistake, and that I have therefore resolved, if ever I take

another husband, to take a man whom I can love and respect with my whole heart and soul. Such men don't grow like the blackberries in your country lanes, Lizzie ; ergo the chances are that I shall remain Mrs. Lumley Rogers to the end of time."

"Oh, I hope not," said Lizzie, already warmly interested in the matter, as young girls invariably are in whatever has the shadow of romance attached to it—"there certainly must be some good and worthy men in the world—indeed I think I know one now, unmarried too, who would be everything the most sanguine wife could desire—you are acquainted with him also, Mrs. Rogers, and will probably guess at once whom I mean."

The smiling look which, as she said this, Lizzie raised to the face of her companion, was met by a grave, inquiring, half embarrassed glance, that struck her as very unaccountable. Mrs. Lumley Rogers was not a woman to take offence, or to be in any way

“put out” by a simple remark which her own previous confessions had suggested, and yet that something was wrong with her now, nobody who looked into her expressive face could for one moment doubt. Lizzie was on the point of hastily apologizing for her unknown fault, when suddenly the cloud rolled away, and Mrs. Rogers was smiling gaily again.

“We are talking like foolish children,” she said, rising and shaking out the ample folds of her graceful dress,—“let us go back to the dancing room, Lizzie, and defer sentiment and romance till we get amongst the rocks at Pengarthen.”

So Lizzie lost the opportunity of recommending Robert Alleyne as a husband to Mrs. Lumley Rogers, and in thinking about it afterwards, she decided in her own mind, that excellent and attractive as they both undeniably were, they would scarcely suit each other as partners for life. A man like her own



Frederick would be infinitely more congenial to the intellectual and brilliant widow.

The last week of the Leonards' stay in town Lizzie pleaded so hard to be excused from spending her evenings from home, on Sarah's account, that her husband yielded to her entreaties, and the sisters had the happiness of belonging entirely to each other for this little time. Even Kitty was not permitted to interfere with their quiet enjoyment, for Frederick himself often volunteered to take her to any place of amusement she had a fancy for, and failing this Mrs. Lumley Rogers would send for her and do her utmost—never unsuccessfully—to procure for her friend's clever little sister an agreeable evening.

Thus all parties were content; and to Sarah and Lizzie the summer hours went by only too quickly, bringing the moment when they must say farewell to each other for many, many months, during which the elder sister

knew that she could receive no positive assurance of her darling's continued happiness.

"But what can you fear for me, you dear, unbelieving girl?" Lizzie asked on one occasion, when Sarah had expressed her anxiety about her sister's future rather more plainly than she was in the habit of doing; "you have seen for yourself how fondly and entirely my husband loves me. I cannot be otherwise than happy while this love continues, and I know, Sarah,—I know, by some inward feeling or intuition of my own, that nothing will ever change or diminish it. This is not vanity, but only that firm, boundless confidence in my husband which every wife ought, I think, to possess."

"My darling," Sarah said, fondly, "I would not for the world seek to lessen the confidence you speak of. I would only guard you if I might against yielding up your whole soul to one affection, and thus risking the shipwreck of your life's peace, if not your life itself, at a single blow. If you had a child, Lizzie, round

whom you wrapped all the passionate devotion of your nature, as you now wrap it round your husband, I should tremble nearly in the same degree for your happiness."

"But Sarah, dear, how, after all, can I help it?"

A difficult question to answer, and one that, if answered rightly, would have involved higher teaching than Sarah Anstruther, with all her natural sense and goodness, had it yet in her power to bestow. She replied to it, however, according to the light that was in her.

"You must endeavour to fortify your mind, Lizzie, to surround yourself with duties, to feel that life has claims on you, and is a complete thing, apart from these passionate attachments, which have always a tendency to weaken rather than strengthen our hands for the work that each human being, if he looks for it, will find he has to do. Your position has responsibilities that do not belong to inferior ones. I cannot suggest them to you,

but you will discover them for yourself, and I hope set about discharging them wisely and bravely. I want my darling to be something more than simply a wife who loves her husband."

Lizzie remained very thoughtful for a few minutes after her sister had thus spoken. Then, raising the sweet, wistful face that she had buried in her hands, she said, with touching humility:

"But I don't feel as if I ever could be more than that, Sarah; so, at least, what I can do, let me have the satisfaction of doing well. Love is so easy, and everything else, to weak natures like mine, so very, very difficult."

"And what will suffering be, I wonder," Sarah thought to herself; but the picture her imagination quickly drew was so terrible to contemplate, that with a cold shudder she thrust it from her, and hastened to talk of other things.

This conversation between the sisters had

occurred the evening before their parting. The next day Sarah and Kitty returned to Linden House; and on the same afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Leonard started for Pengarthen Hall.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE CORNISH HOME.

A BRIGHT evening sun was gilding all the quaintly-shaped turrets, crimsoning the long, gothic windows, and changing into a softer green the dark ivy upon the walls of Pengarthen Hall, when Lizzie's delighted and admiring eyes first fell upon her new home. She had complained of great fatigue during the latter part of their journey, but all this was forgotten now in the joyful eagerness with which she took in every detail of the fair scene spread out before her, and of which she was henceforth to be the happy mistress.

Happy, as she truly felt even then, not on account of the rich and beautiful possession she was rapturously gazing on, but on account of the still richer love she gave and received from the husband seated by her side, and smiling now in real amusement at her enthusiasm.

“Any one would think those soft eyes of yours had never looked upon an old country house before, Lisette,” he said; “there is nothing in the least remarkable that I can discover in my ancestral seat, as novel writers would call it; however, if you are satisfied with its aspect, *tant mieux*. For my part I hate the country and all its weary associations so entirely, that I am sure that I should discern no beauty in Aladdin’s palace if it were suddenly to rise up in the room of Pengarthen Hall before me. Of course, with you, my pretty one,” he added, gallantly, “all places will have charms, and the lack of society will be rather an advantage than otherwise—but you should see Pengarthen in

the winter, Lizzie; the very thought of it makes me shudder."

"Oh, Frederick, how can you dislike the country—the beautiful, beautiful country?" replied Lizzie, with tears of mingled feelings rushing to her eyes; "you cannot imagine what it is to me—what this lovely place will be to me always. I shall never want to leave it, dear, never. Do please tell the coachman to stop and let us walk up to the house. I want to see everything better than I can see it from the carriage—will you, Frederick?"

"Anything you like, of course; but you were tired to death half-an-hour ago, Lisette. Has the sight of this dull old house really revived you?"

"Indeed it has," said the little wife, as she sprung joyously from the carriage the moment the steps were let down, "so entirely revived me that I shall no longer have the excuse of fatigue to plead for not encountering that terrible ordeal to-night; and perhaps, after



all, it is right for me to pay my respects to Mrs. Leonard at once, so"—

"Oh, hang Mrs. Leonard!" interrupted Frederick, with an impatience which even Lizzie had discovered he could at times manifest; "she can wait very well for our visit till the morning; and when we have had some dinner I shall want to show you the house and gardens, since you appear to take so mightily to the place, even at first sight."

"As you please, of course, dearest," was Lizzie's obedient reply; but if she had shrunk less from the dreaded introduction to her husband's step-mother, she would probably have been aware of the existence of some selfish feeling, both on Frederick's part, and her own, in this putting-off of so very manifest a duty.

A number of servants were gathered together in the hall, to welcome their master, and offer their respectful greetings to their new mistress. Frederick nodded to them

carelessly, and a little haughtily—he had no sort of sympathy with the lower classes—but Lizzie, timid though she felt, lingered to say a kind word or two to those who had come forth from the group and spoken for the rest, and smiled sweetly upon them all.

“You will get dressed as quickly as you can,” said Frederick, as his wife followed him into a large, handsomely-furnished room, where the table was laid for two; “I told them to have dinner ready exactly at seven, and it is nearly that now. I’m half dead for want of something to eat.”

“Oh, I’m not,” replied Lizzie, still in the same joyous accents, and running to look at everything in the room—particularly at the old family portraits that hung on the walls—like a child who is just come home for the holidays—“I don’t want to dine at all, Frederick; I should like to see the whole of the house first. Suppose we take a crust of bread and a glass of wine now, and wait for a more substantial meal till it gets dark. Think of

the time we shall lose in dressing and sitting down to table."

"I have rung for the housekeeper, who will conduct you upstairs at once, Lizzie," said the husband, in the very coldest tones he had ever used in addressing his wife. "I am not accustomed to dispense with my regular meals, and I am really too tired and famished to care for talking nonsense."

Poor Lizzie's animation and enthusiasm died out in a moment. She felt she had vexed her husband at the very time when her heart was filled with the warmest love and gratitude towards him; and, ever ready to excuse him and accuse herself, she acknowledged mentally that it was a most unreasonable and unjustifiable thing to ask a hungry man to go without his dinner for a childish whim of her own. Flying up to him, she put her arms round his neck and pressed her rosy lips upon his cheek.

"Forgive me, darling, for being so thoughtless and stupid. I won't be ten minutes

dressing, and we will sit just as long as you like at table—won't you kiss me, Frederick?"

She was much too pretty and winning in her child-like penitence to be resisted for any length of time by a man so keenly sensitive to female loveliness as Frederick Leonard, so after looking into her upturned eyes for a minute or two with a gradually softening face, he stooped from his lofty height, morally as well as physically (for who shall question his right to resent so grave an offence as asking him to give up his dinner?) and embraced the culprit with all his wonted tenderness, unconscious that the housekeeper who had been summoned was standing on the threshold waiting her lady's commands.

A short cough warned the married lovers that their pretty little scene of reconciliation had not been without a witness. A dark, rather than a red, flush gathered in Mr. Leonard's face as the fact and the individual became at the same instant revealed to him.

Lizzie was only a little abashed, as she

would have been had her own sister caught her with her arms clinging so tightly round her husband. She had scarcely glanced at the person in the doorway till Frederick, recovering himself, said somewhat constrainedly :

“Lizzie, my dear, here is Miss Ash come to show you to your room—had you not better go with her at once?”

Then the wife turned and fronted the woman, whose title of “Miss” (one naturally pictures the housekeepers of old country mansions as ancient ladies with the prefix of Mrs. to their names) had somewhat startled her.

The appearance, however, of her new servant was destined to startle her still more.

A tall, exquisitely made brunette, with a face that even taken in detail the most fastidious critic must acknowledge to be perfect as to outline, and with great brown eyes set in it that of themselves, allowing all the other features to have been plain, would have constituted a countenance of very remarkable

beauty—a rich flush in the rounded cheeks, a natural, undulating wave in the black, plainly braided hair, and the whole aspect suggestive of a spirit formed to rule and not to be ruled, though the dress was in the very strictest accordance with the station of the wearer. Such was the new housekeeper of Pengarthen Hall, the “Miss” Ash who now stood quietly and respectfully (for all her queenlike bearing) waiting to conduct Mrs. Frederick Leonard to her room up stairs.

Till they reached the landing Lizzie was really too astonished, too lost in admiration of her beautiful attendant, to be able to say a word. Then, as the stately Leah turned round for a moment, her little mistress, with an impulse that, however amiable, was certainly not wise, exclaimed:

“Oh! how very pretty you are! much too pretty to be in service. Why does your mother let you leave her? I want so much to know all about you. I thought housekeepers

were always old women—ours was at home. What made you think of coming here?"

At this second question Lizzie paused and blushed a little at her own childish eagerness. Leah manifested neither surprise nor emotion of any kind, though at the first sound of Mrs. Leonard's voice her wonderful eyes had slightly dilated.

"You are very good, ma'am, to express so much interest in me," she replied, exactly in a tone an ordinary servant under similar circumstances would have used; "but there is little enough to know about me. I belong to this neighbourhood, though I have lived away from it till the last eighteen months. My father rents a farm on the estate, and so, when I wanted a situation a little better than common, Mrs. Leonard, senior, was good enough to engage me as housekeeper here. I hope, ma'am, I may be fortunate enough to suit you."

"Oh, you are sure to suit me," Lizzie said; "I am not at all difficult to please, only—"

she paused here, as if doubtful of the effect her next words might produce; then suddenly remembering that, in spite of her own extreme youth, she was really the head of all this great household, she added, a little timidly—"only I think you are very young for the post you have undertaken."

"I am twenty-six, ma'am," Leah replied, with some dignity; and the next moment, throwing wide a door to their left, she ushered her lady into a magnificent dressing-room, where the French maid was already employed in unpacking and selecting her mistress's evening toilet.

"Anything will do for to-day, Isaure!" exclaimed Lizzie, as she hastened to divest herself of her travelling wraps, and to let down the long coils of golden hair, over whose adornment her accomplished attendant was fond of lingering. "My husband is in a hurry for his dinner, and I have promised not to be ten minutes in my dressing-room. I must not even stay to look at a single thing



now, not even at that lovely view from the windows—oh, but I will make up for it to-morrow—people don't want to dine at seven o'clock in the morning. There, that will do, my good Isaure—twist the hair up anyhow, and give me my blue silk dress. I promise you to do more credit to your taste and skill another day."

"Madame must always look charming," said the polite Isaure, speaking after the manner of her class, and as she would have spoken had her mistress been fifty and a gorgon.

But there was one gazing through the only partially-closed door, who acknowledged and *felt* the peculiar charm and fascination of Lizzie's girlish loveliness—one who dreamt that night of those innocent blue eyes and those long waving masses of golden hair, and who awoke with a sweet voice ringing in her ears and repeating again its childish praises of her own—poor Leah's—beauty.

Lizzie entered the dining-room just three

minutes after her hungry lord, and two minutes before their dinner was placed upon the table. Frederick was in an excellent temper now, and quite ready to commend his wife for the dispatch she had used ; and to listen, when the servants were dismissed, to the remarks she had to make concerning the little she had yet seen of her new and splendid establishment.

Last of all—though why it should have been so, Lizzie could not have explained—she spoke to him of Miss Ash, the housekeeper, and asked him if he had sanctioned her being engaged in that capacity ; if he had known her before ; and if he did not consider her personal attractions very remarkable. To these numerous questions Mr. Leonard replied, a little rebukingly :

“ My dear Lizzie, you must really, in your present position, guard against expressing so much surprise, and exhibiting so much enthusiasm concerning things that are in themselves excessively simple and natural.

Leah Ash is no doubt a very fine young woman—I quite agree with you as to that—but her coming here as housekeeper is merely the result of her father, an old tenant of mine, being in reduced circumstances, and not able to afford to keep his grown-up daughters at home. Leah has been educated a trifle better than the rest of them, and would consequently have been unfitted for any service beneath this to which Mrs. Leonard has appointed her. Are you satisfied now, little one, or must I enter into yet minuter details concerning the important affair in which you have condescended to be interested?"

"Oh, I am abundantly satisfied, dearest," replied Lizzie, with a smile that reflected a heart entirely at rest; "and I will try for the time to come to keep all undue surprise and enthusiasm within bounds. Only to-night, Frederick, just while I am seeing my beautiful new home, let me be a child and say whatever enters first into my childish head. You used to declare, before we were

married, that you liked me all the better for my being such a little ignoramus, and that you would not have me conventional or artificial for the world."

"Nor would I now, Lisette—only I don't want you to make a fuss about people beneath you. Leave all sentimental interest in 'the great unwashed' to the dowager, who adores the whole community, and, but that the most of them prefer naked feet, would pull off her own stockings and shoes to put upon her *protégés*. Whatever you do hereafter to make the country endurable, never, Lisette, commit the vulgar error of turning yourself into a sister of charity for the sake of a parcel of beggars, who would murder you, if they dared, for the gold chain round your neck or even the wedding ring upon your finger."

This sort of language was as new to Lizzie as the hard opinions it expressed; but at eighteen the reasoning powers are rarely very acute, and though she might have a

passing suspicion that her beloved husband was wrong in judging his fellow men so harshly, she would excuse him, on the plea that he had adopted, without reflection, an idea current amongst people of his class, and that his own heart had in truth nothing to do with it. She might think, as so many fond and sanguine young wives *will* think—"Ah, by and bye, all this will be different—he will see as I see, and feel as I feel, and we shall walk ever happily onwards with one heart and one mind between us."

Poor young wives! where is the limit to their hopes and expectations concerning that wonderful future into which they look so yearningly and yet with blinded eyes that see none of the dark perils, the gloomy pitfalls, the lonely, lonely deserts that will meet them, or they will have to traverse by and bye?

Lizzie had certainly no vision of any of those ugly things to-night as, escorted by Frederick, she explored every nook (except the small range of apartments occupied by Mrs.

Leonard) of Pengarthen Hall, and wound up the evening by a moonlight ramble in the wild but beautiful grounds which she secretly promised herself to go over again alone while the lark was singing his first song in the morning.

## CHAPTER XI.

## CLOUDS IN THE SUMMER SKY.

THE splendour of the early summer morning that followed the arrival of the young couple at Pengarthen might have tempted even a less enthusiastic admirer of nature than Mrs. Frederick Leonard to rise betimes and wander out amongst the dewy flowers.

It was delicious upon the long southern terrace, just beneath the drawing-room and library windows, and where the rich perfume of the roses that clambered up the walls

“Made the warm air such luxury to breathe.”

Equally delicious too, upon the smooth

velvet lawn where the gentlest of breezes from a small natural lake that divided the cultivated parts of the grounds from a dark green wilderness of larch and pine trees beyond, stirred the leaves of the bending acacias, and brought at the same time a welcome freshness to Lizzie's glowing cheek. Everything in fact was delicious to this young and happy wife, roaming at her own sweet will among these fairy scenes, and keenly alive to the joyous consciousness that while her home was henceforth here, the love which had bestowed so much upon her would be ever here beside her and around her too; and that this love was capable of transforming even a desert into a paradise.

It would be far too long a task to follow Lizzie in all the bright and hopeful thoughts that danced through her busy little heart and head that morning, as she rambled alone in the sunshine while her husband and indeed the larger proportion of the household slept. It will be enough to say, that she formed a



thousand schemes for leading not only a happy, but a good and useful life ; that she had visions of improving herself first—poor Lizzie was really humble—and then of helping to improve some of those around her ; that she had vague notions of schools for little children and alms-houses for aged women ; that her imagination even soared towards the building of a church if it should be found wanting ; and that, in short, the “responsibilities” of her new position had suddenly rushed like a flood into the mind of this simple little girl, not lessening her joyousness, but giving a degree of earnestness and dignity to her feelings in general that they had not yet possessed. In London she had had no time to think of any of these things. Pengarthen Hall was only seen then through the dim mist of fancy ; but now that she was actually here—mistress of all she surveyed, and of a great deal more that she would only by degrees become acquainted with,—Lizzie felt that she must indeed be a child no longer, and hoped that her

dear husband, in spite of his light manner of talking, would really by and bye guide and assist her in the various duties of her station, and learn to think more tenderly and charitably of his fellow men.

Remembering at this point of her meditations his remarks about Mrs. Leonard's championship of the poor, Lizzie, for the first time, admitted, more as a passing suggestion than as a distinct thought, the possibility of this dreaded relative turning out to be a good woman after all. Frederick might have conceived a prejudice against her in the beginning—step-mothers had seldom fair play from their husband's children—and never afterwards taken the trouble to ascertain how far it was justified.

Had not Robert Alleyne—unquestionably a good and in every way a superior man himself—spoken of her with a reverence approaching to adoration? Had not Sarah always said to her sister, “suspend your

judgment and control your hard thoughts of this lady till you know her?"

"I shall know her in a few hours," was Lizzie's concluding meditation on the subject, "and if I find her really good and disposed to like me, I will never rest till Frederick abandons his prejudice against her, and we are all firm friends."

With this wise and right-minded determination Lizzie went back to the house, and found her husband just entering the breakfast room, and looking, in spite of the bright vision that was there to greet him in the shape of his sweet young wife, considerably out of temper.

"Hang these people, and the country, and everything!" he exclaimed, barely returning Lizzie's embrace, as he walked to the bell and pulled it violently, "they can't let a man have an instant's peace in his own house. If Pengarthen were not entailed, I'd sell it tomorrow, and go and live where there are no poor to bother one. I hate the poor."

These angry words fell the more coldly upon Lizzie's heart from the kind, warm thoughts in reference to these same "poor" that had so recently been filling it; but she only said, very gently—

"What is the matter, dear? Who is worrying you?"

"Oh, everybody, I think," he answered, crossly. "What do the idiots suppose I pay a steward for if it is not to get out of the trouble of attending to their paltry affairs myself? What do I know or care about their grievances—my own are quite sufficient for me. But it's always the same — the moment I set my foot in this detested place they swarm about me like bees, and, without absolute violence, there's no getting rid of them."

"Do you mean that some of your poor tenants have come up this morning to speak to you?" Lizzie asked a little timidly, for she had never yet seen her husband so entirely put out as now.

"Half a hundred of them, I have no doubt, and those fools of servants pretend that they can't keep them out. They are in league with them, I know, to drive me distracted; but I'll soon settle them all."

"Where are the people, dear?"

"Down-stairs, I presume, unless by this time they have invaded the library. Breakfast at once," (in a thundering voice, to the footman who now entered), "and make those fellows understand that I have no time to listen to them to-day."

"Please, sir, there are more women than men, and they won't be said 'no' to; they want, some of them, to speak to the lady."

"Oh, let me go to them," exclaimed Lizzie, with sparkling eyes, and making an eager rush at the door. "I won't be ten minutes, Frederick, and—"

Her words and her steps were arrested at the same moment by the weight of her husband's hand upon her shoulder.

"Tell them 'the lady' has something else

to do, Penfold, and send them away at once."

This time Frederick spoke very quietly, but it was from between tightly-compressed teeth, and Lizzie's heart sank strangely as she went back to her place at the table, and hid what she could of her suddenly whitened face amongst a bunch of flowers she had brought in from the garden.

When the husband spoke it was only to say—

"I thought I had made my wishes sufficiently clear to you last night, Lizzie. Once for all, understand that *my wife* is never to meddle with the affairs of the common people who happen to be tenants on our estate. Now let us have some breakfast, and forget this odious interruption to our first morning's quiet."

Fortunately for Lizzie, whose spirits were hopelessly quenched for the time, Mr. Leonard considered eating too important and agreeable a business in itself to require the

addition of conversation, so the meal was partaken of in almost total silence, and at its conclusion Frederick unlocked the letter-bag which had hitherto been lying untouched beside him, and was presently engrossed, to all appearance, in its contents.

After glancing at the morning papers, without in the slightest degree comprehending what they were about, Lizzie abruptly rose from her seat and went and stood behind her husband's chair.

"Frederick dear, I am so sorry to have vexed you," she said, gently and meekly. "I did not think you could mind my seeing or speaking to any of these poor people in our own house. I should like so very much to be kind to them, to do them what little good I could. It seems to me that it is our duty, situated as we are, to attend to their complaints, and look after their comforts. Some stewards are very hard upon the poor."

"Hang it, Lizzie," interrupted her husband, rather roughly extricating his shoulder from

the light, caressing touch she had laid upon it; "I suppose I don't require a girl like you to teach me my duty; and as for yours, that, I believe, according to the prayer book, is to obey your husband. I am busy now as you see. Try to find some amusement for yourself this morning, and in the afternoon—we lunch, remember, at two precisely—I will drive you round the estate."

Now, although Lizzie's poor little heart was full nearly to bursting, she had too much self respect to betray emotion in the presence of the man whose injustice she could not, in spite of all her love for him, avoid feeling, so after the pause of a few seconds to steady her voice, she said, with very tolerable composure:

"If you have no objection I will pay my visit to Mrs. Leonard this morning. I can make excuses for you if you do not wish to accompany me."

"By all means—the dowager has been too well trained in respect of my deficiencies, to



manifest any astonishment at your going alone. Don't let her bore you with her philanthropy or her evangelicalism. Show her at once that as *my* wife you take my side and adopt my views in everything. Now give me a good kiss, Lisette, and forget that your childishness made me a little cross to you just now. I am always worried out of my life at this confounded Pengarthen."

Of course Lizzie kissed her penitent husband as he graciously desired her to do, but how "good" the kiss was to either of them I must leave to the reader's imagination. I think, myself, that kissing under similar circumstances,—that is with a wound all unhealed, only covered over by the arbitrary command of the inflicter of it—is better let alone.

Before prosecuting her intention of calling on Mrs. Leonard, Lizzie thought it her duty to send for the housekeeper and ascertain whether that young woman was really competent to assume the entire control of all

domestic matters, or whether there would still remain any part of them which she, as mistress of the house, would need to look into.

Leah Ash soon set her mind at rest on this latter point. Mr. Leonard had spoken to her the previous evening, and invested her with full authority over all the inferior servants, and in every other matter that would require a clear, intelligent, and experienced head to direct. Except on the occasions of dinner parties, when Mr. Leonard would himself inspect the bill of fare, Miss Ash was to have the entire ordering of the dinner, so that, as she added, with a passing smile that Lizzie thought rather out of place, "you, ma'am, may be spared all possible trouble and annoyance."

"It would be no annoyance to me to attend to the affairs of my own household," Lizzie said, too quickly and impulsively for her dignity—"but, of course, Mr. Leonard has made these arrangements from motives of

kindness, and in consideration of my inexperience. I should have imagined *you* scarcely more experienced than myself, Leah, but of course my husband and Mrs. Leonard know best. I will not detain you longer now, as I am sure you cannot have too much time for your numerous duties."

Leah curtseyed respectfully and left the room, and thus terminated the second interview—and the last for a considerable time—between the young mistress and her very handsome housekeeper.

It was with feelings that certainly differed a great deal from those which had animated her during her bright morning walk, that Lizzie now summoned her maid and prepared for her duty visit to Mrs. Leonard. It was still a duty visit, but no longer so greatly dreaded an one. The young wife's grieved and sorrowing heart was just in that state when the yearning for womanly companionship and womanly kindness is most sensibly felt. She would not indeed permit herself to

dwell on Frederick's harshness, or by a single errant thought acknowledge that he had fallen in her esteem; but there was, for all this tender loyalty to the man she so fondly loved, a stinging consciousness, not only of personal injustice—that was nothing to so humble-minded a little woman as Frederick Leonard's wife—but of cold-hearted selfishness and tyranny developing themselves in the character of the husband with whom she was to pass her life—a life that only a few hours before Lizzie had filled in imagination with love and charity and deeds of gentle kindness towards all men.

So because of this chill shadow resting so heavily on the poor little half-frightened heart—a shadow to which she battled desperately against giving a name—Lizzie rather welcomed than shrank from the idea of her approaching interview with the dowager Mrs. Leonard. A woman's warm pressure of the hand, a woman's motherly smile, a woman's kind and tender voice falling on her ear, would

be just now unspeakably soothing, and help her to bury in oblivion the painful hour she had passed in the breakfast room.

"Madame is entirely charming this morning," said Isaure, when the really simple toilet was complete. "May I tell Monsieur that he can come and look at the effect of the new robe and mantle? Monsieur is pleased like a child when Madame makes a fresh toilette, and this lace mantelet is so very elegant."

"Never mind my mantelet to-day, Isaure. Monsieur is busy, and he will see me in it often enough. Inquire the way to Mrs. Leonard's rooms, and ascertain from her servants whether she can receive my visit this morning. I am going to walk on the terrace till you return."

"Something is wrong," decided the observant *femme de chambre*, as she noted the depressed tones of her mistress's voice—"a quarrel with *le beau mari* perhaps. I must talk it over with *cette aimable* Miss Ash, at

our quiet little dinner by and bye. There's no fun in these sort of families unless one gets some thunder and lightning now and then.

*Autrement c'est bien monotone !*"

If poor Lizzie, in going out upon the terrace, had indulged a secret hope that her husband, who was now in the library, would join her and make more ample amends than he had yet done for his unkindness of the morning, she was disappointed. Nobody came near her until Isaure brought a message from Mrs. Leonard, signifying that she was quite at liberty to receive the visit proposed to her.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A VISIT TO THE STEPMOTHER.

THE first thing that struck Lizzie on being ushered by a quiet-looking elderly female servant into the rooms of her new relative was the striking contrast these rooms presented to her own. Except that they were large and lofty they bore no resemblance whatever to anything she had yet seen at Pengarthen Hall. The furniture was not only of the plainest and simplest kind, but evidently of a very ancient date, and some of it in great need of being renewed—the carpets for instance were worn nearly threadbare, and the curtains that shaded the long windows

looked very much as if they would fall to pieces whenever the slightest alteration should be attempted in their present arrangement. An old moth eaten bureau stood in one recess of the sitting-room, and a still older harpsichord occupied the other. An uncovered table, in the centre of the apartment, had a few books and a heap of some coarse needlework scattered upon it; and near the window that was the most remote from the entrance door was an easy-chair and footstool, which, from the circumstance of observing a shawl thrown over the back of the former, Lizzie conjectured to be the state seat of the lady she had come to visit, but who as yet was herself nowhere to be seen.

Between this room and the sleeping apartment there were folding doors of communication, which had been partially open when Lizzie was first shown in—the elderly servant had closed them, however, immediately, saying, as she did so, that her mistress would be disengaged in a few minutes—the fact of



the engagement being rendered apparent to the visitor by the subdued murmuring of voices, seemingly at some far corner of the inner-room.

At the end of about ten minutes, during which Lizzie had discovered that the books on the table were all of a very serious character, and with titles wholly unfamiliar to her, the folding doors opened slowly, and Mrs. Leonard, preceded by about a dozen children, in decidedly questionable costumes, and of both sexes, walked briskly in.

"I will apologise to you in a minute," she said, just glancing towards her young and elegantly attired guest, who had risen on her entrance, and now stood gazing with some embarrassment but more curiosity at this novel scene—"I must get rid of these little people first ; and as they have, most of them, a good walk to their homes, I am bound to find them something to refresh them on their way."

Walking, as she spoke, to the old bureau,

Mrs. Leonard unlocked it, and took out a huge cake, from which she cut, with the utmost expedition, a thick slice for each of her small pensioners, and then bidding them enjoy it, she marshalled them to the outer door, and, ringing a bell, committed the whole juvenile tribe to the care of some unseen person, who answered it, and returned, with the same briskness she had all along manifested, to the patient visitor by the window.

Lizzie now said that she feared she had come at an inconvenient time, that she was quite aware of not having attended to the rules of etiquette in her very early visit, but that she had been anxious to atone for the seeming neglect of the previous evening, when the fatigue of her long journey had made her indolent, &c., &c.

“Well, well,” replied Mrs. Leonard, sitting down immediately opposite to the bride—“since you have thought it necessary to apologize to me, I shall spare my own excuses to you. Time is too precious to be wasted in

mere compliments.—And so you are the child Frederick Leonard has married.”

“I am Frederick’s wife,” was the reply, spoken with a little unconscious dignity by the youthful matron thus oddly addressed. “He would have brought me to you himself, only I wanted to come early, and he has a great deal of business to attend to this morning.”

Mrs. Leonard, senior, appeared inclined to smile at this explanation, but there was a grave look in her eyes that rebuked the mirthful tendency, and she said quietly enough:

“Your husband and myself understand each other pretty well in as far as outward observances of politeness are concerned. For the future let him make his own excuses, if he thinks them necessary (which I doubt), for any lack of attention to me. Unless you are a vast deal better than your neighbours, you will find your own shortcomings quite enough to answer for. Now turn your face a little more to the light, if you please; I want to

judge whether my son's sketch of you was a faithful one. Yes, I think I should have recognised you from his description. You saw Robert more than once in London?"

All this was uttered rapidly if not brusquely, and Lizzie, growing more and more bewildered as her preconceived notions of Frederick's step-mother were thus strangely and completely upset, answered rather timidly:

"Yes, several times. I liked him very much indeed."

"Most people do, I believe," said the mother, without any perceptible softening towards her wondering companion; "but few like him for what is really likeable in him. They hit upon an outward grace of manner, which, being only an adornment bestowed for social uses, is often shared by the most worthless of his sex. I can thank God that Robert Alleyne has something more and above all this. He has the fear of God in his heart, and lives the life of a christian."

Poor Lizzie! she really did begin to feel

now as if she had got into a strange land, and was listening to an unknown language. Frederick had prepared her to find what he was pleased to term a "canting, methodistical humbug," in his despised step-mother, and upon his irreverent description Lizzie had founded her own ideas of the lady in question. All these ideas, even modified as they had lately become, represented a very grave, melancholy, slow-voiced woman, giving out her words with a kind of nasal drawl, decrying the vanities of the world, exhorting to church-going and psalm-singing, but withal possessing a degree of feminine gentleness that would have been—this morning at least—singularly acceptable to the wife hurt by the husband's roughness. Like thousands of others, older and wiser than herself, Lizzie was accustomed to associate professors of religion with extreme gravity and dullness, and a constant obtruding of their pious exhortations upon all with whom they might come in contact.

Evidently Mrs. Leonard was fashioned after

an entirely different model. She was not dull, she was not slow, she did not speak through her nose ; her lips appeared to have quite an obstinate inclination to wreath themselves into smiles, and her broad smooth forehead looked wholly unaccustomed to frowns ; and yet she made it understood by a simple word or two—not didactically spoken—that she did profess to serve God and was not ashamed of her profession ; and she had no superfluous gentleness of a motherly kind to bestow upon the poor little wounded girl who had come to her with a yearning for sympathy and affection that ought surely to have met an instant response from so good a woman.

But of course, Mrs. Leonard was not in the secret of the little matrimonial unpleasantness of the morning. Of course she could not any more than her fellow men dive at once into the remote corners of people's hearts ; and in receiving for the first time the young and lovely bride of the wealthy and accomplished Frederick Leonard, how was

it possible for her to suspect that here was any room or occasion for the exercise of her especial functions.

She might have her own reasons for declining in this case to act upon that command which bids the Christian—"rejoice with them that do rejoice;" but assuredly it was ignorance, and not lack of readiness to obey, which withheld her from weeping with her who wept.

Nevertheless Lizzie, even while constrained in some sort to feel interested in the very novel character presented to her, was disappointed and repelled by the absence of warmth and friendly encouragement in the manner of her hostess, and on Mrs. Leonard's pausing after her last observation, as if expecting an answer, she looked up in her face with quite a constrained expression on her own, and said only:

"I am sure he is very good as well as very agreeable."

"I hope to see him at Pengarthen before

the summer is over," continued the dowager, unconsciously showing that she gave this speech of Lizzie's no more than its due weight; "he loves our quiet Cornish village, with its rocks and its wild sea, nearly as well as I do. I trust you will learn in time to like it a little too."

Now Lizzie, as the reader knows, had a very strong persuasion that she should like it very much indeed at once, but Mrs. Leonard's words and manner chilled her; chilled her the more because it seemed manifest to her that her companion was a cheerful, genial kindly natured woman, and that therefore her present mood of reserve and stiffness must be the result of a preconceived prejudice against herself, which Lizzie was inclined to resent for many reasons—the chief among them being, that in all her young life she had experienced nothing but love and admiration and unbounded kindness from every one with whom she had been brought in contact.

So instead of replying out of the fullness of



her heart that she already loved her new home dearly, she said in a quiet, joyless tone, that she had no doubt of being very contented at Pengarthen, and then feeling vexed with herself for the temper of which she was conscious, she suddenly assumed more animation, and asked Mrs. Leonard who the little children were that she had found in her room on entering.

“They are just the ragamuffins of the village,” was the explanation; the face of the speaker breaking into quite a sunshiny expression now: “little rogues and roguesses, who are voted too mischievous and too dirty to be admitted into the Vicar’s model schools—so I have them up to try and get them into decent training. After a fortnight’s regular attendance, I give them a new frock or a new jacket, as the case may be, and at the end of a month they are usually considered sufficiently whitewashed to be introduced to the schools I have mentioned, and where they learn of course a great deal more than I profess to

teach them. The vicar and his wife will call upon you in a day or two no doubt, and bespeak your interest and co-operation in all their benevolent schemes. In a village like this there is plenty of work to be done, and very few workers to do it. I get impatient sometimes because I have only one pair of legs and hands, and these by no means so active or so faithful as they ought to be."

Lizzie bit her lips and looked on the ground. She would have given much at that moment to have dared to say, ignorant and inexperienced as she knew herself to be:—"Let *me* help you—take my young hands and legs, and willing heart, and use them in the good service to which your life is devoted"—but she remembered the stern prohibition of the morning, and while a blush of shame dyed her cheeks, she was constrained to sit still and say nothing.

Of course Mrs. Leonard was still in the dark as to the motive cause of this silence. Her face gradually assumed a graver and

more thoughtful expression as she looked at the bending head of the fair young creature opposite to her, and reflected on the life of idle, dangerous pleasure that she believed poor Lizzie had in contemplation—reflected too on something else which was even clearer to her than this, and that made her wish very heartily that Mrs. Frederick Leonard had remained a stranger to her.

Her next words were so cold and formal that Lizzie, after replying as coldly and formally to them, though her voice was trembling with unshed tears, prepared to go.

“I shall return this visit to-morrow,” Mrs. Leonard said, as they shook hands at parting —“and after that you must hold me absolved from the ordinary rules of etiquette. Come and see me whenever you feel inclined—never without—but forgive me if I say frankly that I consider my time too valuable, both to myself and others, to be wasted in visits of ceremony. And now, good-bye. You have my best wishes for your welfare.

Let me advise you, if your husband is too busy to amuse you, to take advantage of this lovely day and go and look at our rocks and sea—they are worth the trouble, I assure you.”

Lizzie said, hurriedly, that she did not doubt it, and then passing out of the door which Mrs. Leonard opened for her, she ran all the way to her own rooms, and locking herself securely in, threw aside the charming “toilette,” in which Isaure had so proudly attired her ; and, for the first time since she had borne Frederick Leonard’s name, cried long and bitterly.

Mrs. Leonard, senior, also shut herself in her own room for a little space, after her guest had left her ; but her eyes were dry when she came out of it again, and her whole countenance, though saddened, had a calm and stedfast look in it.

Writing to her son that same day, she said, “I have seen Frederick’s wife, and, for awhile, my heart was very heavy for her ; but though

*we* cannot help in any way, there is One who can, and to Him I have, with some little faith, committed her. Oh, Robert, can you understand what my temptation was, to take this lovely child, with her seraph's face, to my heart, and offer her a mother's love and tenderness? But I dare not—I dare not; I should grow cold to other duties in growing warm to her, and then, by and bye, when her sore trials come, when she is awakened—poor, innocent lamb, out of her present golden dream, it would kill me to witness her suffering. So, Robert, you must tempt me no more with praises of this girl-wife—this blue eyed, low voiced, little enchantress. I will not think of her; I will not seek her; I will not love her. I will only, God helping me, continually pray for her.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

## CONJUGAL DIFFERENCES.

WHEN the husband and wife met at luncheon they had both of them banished from their countenances all traces of the different agitations of the morning. Frederick, tired probably of his own company or with the "grave business" that had been occupying him, was glad to have his bright little wife beside him again; and Lizzie's still fluttering heart, yearning for a word of love and kindness, bounded joyfully at the look of welcome she received from her husband, and remembered no more its weary pain of the last few hours.

"And how do you like the dowager?"

Frederick asked carelessly as their meal progressed, for Lizzie had as yet betrayed no inclination to open the subject of her visit to Mrs. Leonard.

"I don't think she likes me," was the somewhat quaint answer; "and, Frederick, you had misled me entirely as to her age and personal appearance."

"Had I? Did I not always say she was ancient and ill-favoured?"

"But she is neither of these in my opinion. Certainly she does not look above fifty at the most, and her face is rather agreeable than otherwise."

"Quite a matter of taste, Lisette. I call her ugly, dowdy, common looking; and, after forty, all women, having ceased to be young, may reasonably be denominated old. Did she preach much to you, or bewail over you for having become the wife of so desperate a sinner as myself?"

"No—she did not preach at all—but I do believe she is a good woman, and—" Lizzie

paused as if half-fearful to conclude her sentence, but seeing that Frederick waited for it, added deprecatingly : "I really wish she could like me."

"Don't be a little fool," exclaimed the gentleman, covering his impoliteness with a laugh that his companion just then could not echo, "women of that sort are not prone to like or love out of their own puritanical sect. Depend upon it, Lisette, I should never have chosen a wife whom Mrs. Leonard could have taken into her affections. Let this be your consolation, *ma petite*; and now another glass of wine—you must, indeed, to drink to our perfect unanimity of feeling in all things—and then we will prepare for our drive lest any of the heavy country folks should drop in to look at the new mistresss of Pengarthen Hall, and so hinder our getting out. I abhor country neighbours."

Lizzie enjoyed excessively that first drive alone with her husband through the park and woods, and along the quiet meadow-bordered



roads that enclosed their own estate. Out beyond all this he told her the country was wild and barren in the extreme, what romantic people called picturesque and grand and imposing, but what to him was suggestive only of cold and discomfort and everything disagreeable; he never willingly extended his drives in that direction; he was sure Lizzie would agree with him in always preferring the pleasant, cultivated lands nearer home. As for the village, it was simply hateful. A few dozen squalid cottages or huts built as close as they could be to the sea; then a narrow dirty street or two running up to a sort of rude triangle where stood the church and the new schools and the few dull, brick houses of the Pengarthen gentry "such gentry, Lisette!" This was the beautiful hamlet—concerning which Mr. Alleyne had been so eloquent, and through which alone the dwellers at the hall could get down to the famous rocks and sea.

Lizzie had a great longing to be taken there

to-day, but Frederick made a face at the idea of driving through the village, and showed her instead, through a break in the woods, a distant line of blue ocean that made her all the more eager to get close to it, and decided her on finding her way thither the first thing on the following morning.

They dined alone and spent the evening in another ramble about the lawn and shrubberies, but Frederick did not disguise that the country was already beginning to "sit heavily" upon his spirits, and told his wife to write the next day and entreat Mrs. Lumley Rogers to come down to them.

Lizzie remembered that only yesterday he had said that her society would entirely suffice for him, and meek-hearted as she was and ready in everything to admit her own inferiority to her husband, an uncomfortable feeling, that almost amounted to a sense of injustice took possession of her mind, and deepened the colour on her cheek as she replied:

"I will write of course, Frederick, but will not this great haste on our part be proclaiming to the world that we cannot even for one week entertain each other."

"My good little child," he said, with a laugh that was as much sarcastic as friendly, "you must understand that the most inveterate married lovers that ever became laughing stocks to society, are not expected to do their cooing quite alone when once they get into the country. I shall not be less fond of you, Lisette, but the reverse, for having other women around me. My nature is gregarious and I have never been accustomed, after the fashion of my saintly stepmother, to mortify it."

This at least was an undoubted truth, and one that his wife was to become more and more alive to every day.

After a pause, in which Lizzie was endeavouring to beat back the sadness that would otherwise have found its way into her voice, she said very quietly and humbly—

"I am afraid, Frederick, and it is not for the first time, that my mind is too uncultivated and childish to qualify me for companionship with intellectual people. I will try to learn anything you like, dear, if you will only take the trouble to teach me. What are those things that you and Mrs. Rogers talk so much about together? Would it be quite impossible for me to gain some knowledge of them?"

"Quite impossible, *Lisetta mia*, without spoiling you utterly for what you are," the husband replied, with really a good-natured laugh this time, and turning to kiss his wife's innocent lips as he spoke; "don't be a foolish child, and worry yourself with absurd and unfounded notions. I admire Mrs. Lumley Rogers excessively, both for her intellect and her personal attractions, but I should not have married her could I have chosen between her and Miss Elizabeth Anstruther. Does that quiet your little heart, and reconcile you to the task of writing to our interesting friend to-morrow?"

Lizzie said, "yes, it did," and spoke in a more cheerful tone, and squeezed her husband's hand as it was retiring from patting her cheek; but in her inmost heart she was unreasonable enough to wish that Frederick, while soothing her wounded feelings, had not so plainly manifested that he still intended to do in all points exactly as he pleased.

After their walk, when lights were brought into the drawing-room, Frederick stretched himself on the sofa with some newspapers and books, and Lizzie, left thus to her own resources, took out her writing case and scribbled a long letter to Sarah. She meant that letter to be cheerful and even gay, but to the keen eyes and loving heart of the ever anxious sister, it conveyed the first intimation that the clouds were beginning to gather, which should all too soon brood over the whole earthly horizon of the dear one, whom even her strong watchful love had been impotent to save.

Lizzie fulfilled her intention of getting down to the sea the next morning before breakfast,

but she found it a much longer walk than she had reckoned on, and Isaure, whom she took with her lest her husband should be angry at her going alone, complained bitterly of the distance and the rough hilly road, and could see no beauty in that wild restless sea, beating its foamy waves against the dark rocks that hung over it in majestic grandeur, looking like ocean giants condemned to a lonely and perpetual watch beside the element from which they had sprung.

To Lizzie it was really a scene of enchantment, for however deficient in general knowledge and in mental cultivation she might be, she had more than her due share of that species of imagination which finds its delights in nature, and weaves its fairest dreams amongst the wildest, loneliest, and most desolate of her creations.

It would have pleased her to remain alone here for hours watching the dancing waves, catching their spray upon her flushed cheeks,

inhaling the pure breeze that came over that wide waste of waters, and forgetting everything for awhile that lay beyond the boundary of the sheltering rocks behind her.

But luckily Isaure was at hand to remind her of home and duty, and as the village clock struck eight Lizzie turned reluctantly away, and began to retrace her steps, wishing vainly that she dared linger to have a little talk with the few old sailors and fishermen who were beginning now to gather upon the beach, and who had bidden her good morning in such pleasant and respectful tones.

As mistress and maid toiled up the steep village street, a gentleman passed them, coming leisurely down it on horseback. Lizzie, absorbed in her own thoughts, would probably not have noticed him had not his very fixed and unscrupulous observation of herself obliged her to do so. She saw that he was both a young and a handsome man, but his rudeness in staring at her so pertinaciously

displeased her, and after this *rencontre* she kept Isaure beside her, and quickened her steps towards home.

Nevertheless on arriving there, she found to her dismay that for the first time since her marriage she had kept her husband waiting for his breakfast. He did not complain much of this, although it was quite evident that it had a great deal to do with the bad temper he was in; but he expressed his strong disapproval of his wife's rambling beyond their own grounds so early, and intimated as clearly as he could, without giving a positive command, that it was not to occur again.

Poor Lizzie checked a rising sigh, kissed her husband as lovingly as ever, and then, without a word of opposition or remonstrance, took her place at the breakfast table.

The letters and papers occupied Frederick as usual till the conclusion of the meal. As he was leaving the room after it, he said to his wife:

"Don't forget to write to Mrs. Lumley by



and bye, and you may tell her that in coming down to us at once, she will not be quite dependent on our society. I am going to ask Erskine and his mother to spend a week here. I know they will call to-day, and then I shall give the invitation."

"Erskine," exclaimed Lizzie, looking up with a suddenly flushed face at the speaker, "no relations I hope, Frederick, to the Honourable Edward Erskine, who behaved so cruelly and *dishonourably* to dear Sarah!"

The little wife was actually quite excited, and her words came out sharply and with unusually emphatic utterance.

Frederick looked at her for a minute, and then with a sudden fire darting into his eyes—those pale blue eyes that, with their dangerous softness, had once reached the very depths of Lizzie's heart, he came back into the room, closing the door after him.

"Lizzie, I hope you won't provoke me to say harsh or unkind things to you. Understand once and for always that I have *never*

*been thwarted or contradicted in my life, and that I never mean to be!* Edward Erskine is an old friend of mine, and nobody in their senses could conceive the possibility, much less the necessity, of my giving him up because he happened to shrink from the idea of marrying a woman who had become disfigured by the small pox. I should have done the same myself, and so would any man with a pair of eyes in his head. Your sister has shown marvellously little delicacy in complaining of it."

Had Lizzie heard aright? Was it her beloved husband, her tender, loving, generous Frederick who had thus spoken, and was it Sarah, the dear, dear sister, the good, patient, noble minded, unselfish Sarah of whom he spoke? Impossible in the present whirl of emotions to reflect upon anything. Only the last words clung to Lizzie's ear and suggested her almost spirited reply—

"Sarah complain! Sarah wanting in delicacy! My Sarah, my darling, give one pas-

sing regret to so base a man ! Oh, Frederick, I never thought you could hurt me as you have hurt me now, and I tell you plainly you will break my heart if you insist on my receiving this Edward Erskine as a friend."

Mr. Leonard was evidently taken by surprise ; he had not calculated on his wife's devoted attachment to the sister he hated, leading her into any active opposition to his wishes. He saw plainly that Lizzie was as much excited now as, with her delicate organisation, it was safe for her to be, and as he was by no means tired yet of the very pretty toy he had secured for himself, he decided on relinquishing the strife for the moment :

"Why, what a little virago you can be, Lisette," he exclaimed, with a very clever concealment of all the angry feelings he had so recently manifested. "I thought I had married a dove, and lo ! I find I have got only a beautiful tigress. In consideration of this beauty, however, which I never saw more radiant than to-day, we will once more

kiss and be friends. I have really work to do in the library or I would spend the whole morning with you—but, by the bye, you are promised a visit from the dowager, are you not? So, farewell, pretty one, and mind those tigerish claws of yours are out of sight when we meet at luncheon.”

He kissed her two or three times, not choosing to observe that she made no response to his embraces, and then without waiting to see whether she had any observation to offer upon his magnanimity, he once more took up the scattered letters and papers and left the room.

Lizzie shed no childish tears to-day, though the wound had been far deeper than that of yesterday; but she sat motionless in the place where Frederick had left her until, more than an hour later, a servant came in to announce that Mrs. Leonard was in the drawing room.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE HUSBAND SHOWING HIMSELF TO BE  
MASTER.

Mrs. LEONARD senior must have been a much duller person than her very intelligent countenance gave any one the slightest reason to suppose, had she failed to discover during her half hour's talk with Lizzie that morning, that something had already gone wrong with the poor little wife; for, wholly unused to conceal her feelings, and unfamiliar yet with the stern face of personal sorrow, Lizzie's every word and look betrayed that her heart was aching, and she had a hard matter to play the courteous hostess and direct her con-

versation to subjects of general interest such as she imagined Mrs. Leonard might, for a passing moment be entertained with.

Mrs. Leonard, however, without manifesting the least consciousness of having detected anything amiss, and without imparting to her manner much more warmth than it had possessed the day before, contrived by her own volubility to spare Lizzie all she could, and at the same time to give to the conversation a sufficiently serious tone, to prevent its jarring against that one discordant note so indifferently concealed in her companion's trembling heart.

They talked of the rocks and the sea which Lizzie had been so charmed with a few hours ago, and of the simple, honest, uncultivated people whose rude homes were scattered about the coast, and with all of whom Mrs. Leonard appeared tolerably acquainted; and then she told Lizzie how she had won the little wild children to come to her essentially ragged school, and how she herself enjoyed watching their gradual transformation into something

like civilized and clean humanity. And Lizzie, though she lent her attention with difficulty to these details on account of the exceeding heaviness of her spirit, began to think Mrs. Leonard superior to all women she had ever known, and to wish more ardently than before that she could make a friend of her.

On parting this time, she said with quite a touching humility of look and voice :

“I shall like above everything to come and see you very often. I don’t know, when our different friends arrive, how much of leisure I may have ; but will you not think me troublesome or tiresome, if I run in to you for half-an-hour whenever I can ?”

Mrs. Leonard did not immediately reply, but as she still held the hand Lizzie had extended to her, the latter was not wholly discouraged by her silence.

“I shall always be glad to see you,” the elder lady said at length ; “only be careful your visits to me do not prove an occasion of offence to your husband. I am not a favorite

of his, and any superfluous attention from you to me might be displeasing to him."

Lizzie really could not help the sigh that at these words betrayed her concurrence in their too natural suggestion. She smiled, however, immediately after, and added that she would not anticipate misfortunes. Frederick had never yet hinted at a wish to keep her and his step-mother apart. She did not imagine he would at all interfere in the matter.

"Then come by all means," Mrs. Leonard repeated—"whenever your gayer friends can spare you. Except the vicar and his wife I have few visitors, and even these I see now but seldom. If my life were not so active and busy an one, I might call it lonely. As it is, I am abundantly satisfied to be forgotten by the world. It tempted me too much when my lot was cast in the midst of its sunny places. I have learned to thank God for nothing more heartily than for having brought me into the shade."

With which sentiment Mrs. Leonard took



her leave, wishing from the depths of her heart, that however good and beneficial she had found the shade in her own case, she had the power of drawing down a flood of perpetual sunshine upon the pathway of the fair and gentle little girl, who all unconsciously, had even at first sight created in her such a sad and yearning interest.

Until two o'clock Lizzie wandered restlessly about the house, unable to settle to any occupation, unwilling to go out even on the terrace, lest Frederick might chance to seek her, and all the while fighting desperately against the sadness that was weighing upon her timid soul, and striving to convince herself that, after all, it was not so very great a matter she was grieving over.

Not so very great a matter to feel that her husband—the husband she still passionately loved—was less worthy than she had deemed him!

Alas, alas! It is a woeful day for a wife, be she young or old, when the conviction first

dawns upon her, that the very love she is constrained to give—because wife-love is so strangely tenacious a thing—has become a cause of deep humiliation instead of an occasion of honest pride to her.

As the clock struck two, Lizzie, having made a careful toilette, and schooled her inconveniently expressive features into a look of quiet cheerfulness, went down to the dining room, fully resolved to atone, by additional warmth, for the coldness with which she had parted from her husband, and to entreat him, with smiles and caresses instead of frowns and angry excitement, to abandon his intention of compelling her to receive Edward Erskine. She had still the most boundless faith in Frederick's doting love for her, and to this love she would trust for the ultimate overcoming of all her difficulties, the smoothing of all the trials which his long habits of self-will and self-indulgence (she was beginning to get near the root of the matter now,) might not improbably ensure for her.

Walking slowly and thoughtfully into the room where luncheon was laid, not expecting to find her husband there before her, Lizzie was taken quite by surprise at seeing Frederick and another gentleman standing by the window. The former turned round quickly on his wife's entrance, and touching his companion on the shoulder, said pleasantly and gaily:

"Erskine, old fellow, allow me to introduce this lady to you—Mrs. Frederick Leonard,—Mrs. Frederick Leonard, permit me to commend to your hospitality and kindest consideration, an ancient comrade of mine, who has good naturedly promised to spend a week with us, and whose name amongst mortals is the Honourable Edward Erskine."

Lizzie was conscious of becoming very white, and of feeling a momentary impulse stronger than any impulse she had experienced in all her life, to turn and run away, but the necessity of the case, combined with her natural timidity, gave her a sudden power

to face the occasion, and acknowledging the honourable gentlemen's very low and very graceful bow, she just glanced into his bent countenance, and immediately recognised the stranger who had annoyed her in the morning. •

In a few minutes more they were all seated at table—people must eat and drink, or at all events go through the form of doing so, however full of anger, or bitterness, or sorrow their hearts may be—they were all then seated at the table, and Lizzie, in spite of her still pale face, was doing the honours to the guest so cruelly forced upon her, like any other gentle and courteous lady.

Mr. Erskine was not long in getting over any momentary embarrassment which his introduction to Sarah Anstruther's sister might have occasioned him; possibly he felt with his friend Frederick Leonard, that in that old matter he had only acted as any other man of taste and spirit would have done; and so the flush on his dark, handsome cheek might

rather have had reference to the impertinent admiration he had bestowed on Lizzie herself in the morning, than to the wrong done to her sister in former days. Whatever it arose from, however, all traces of it soon passed away, and he convinced his hostess against her will, that as far as all external powers of fascination were concerned, Sarah had had ample excuse for giving her heart to this man, and mourning bitterly, though never impatiently, when his love for her died out with the beauty which had inspired it.

Older by some years than Frederick Leonard, and with ampler knowledge of the world, Edward Erskine was better skilled in disguising the real selfishness of his nature, and in adapting himself to the characters and tastes and moods of all those whom he desired to charm. In intellect he was unquestionably inferior to his friend, but while possessing quite enough for the ordinary purposes of companionship, he had the rare art of making the very best of his gifts, and thus appearing

more thoughtful, more learned, more susceptible of high and noble aspirations, than most of the people he associated with.

Of course Lizzie was not for a moment deceived as to the real value of all these pretensions, but she could not help acknowledging Mr. Erskine's charm of manner and conversation, and in some degree forgetting, even during that first hour spent in his society, the cold reserve it had been her hastily formed wish and intention to manifest invariably towards him.

As for Frederick he appeared quite satisfied with the aspect affairs were taking, and at the conclusion of lunch he went round to his wife's chair and embraced her, in the presence of their guest, with the most demonstrative tenderness.

"I am going out with Erskine this afternoon," he whispered, "and so I am afraid you will lose your drive, but there will no doubt be some people calling by and bye, who

will amuse you; and in the evening we will have a walk together. Kiss me, Lisette."

Lizzie kissed him, not perhaps with her usual warmth, but still too kindly and affectionately to give him, under the circumstances, any just cause of complaint.

"You will not forget Mrs. Lumley," he said, after this little conjugal interlude was over; and then he went out, apparently in the best of tempers, with Edward Erskine.

Lizzie had a dull time of it for the next hour or so. Her thoughts were not pleasant companions, and she could not get rid of them, though she tried with all her might. But a call from the vicar and his wife brought a little temporary relief to her, as, in the necessary effort to entertain her guests, she forgot for awhile herself and her annoyances.

Mr. and Mrs. Chester were very excellent, commonplace people, sincerely anxious to do good in their generation, and according to their limited opportunities; but holding the

opinion almost inevitable to this type of character, that good was only to be done in one way—their way, of course—and that persons who attempted it in any other, were presumptuous and mistaken, no matter how earnest or devoted.

Lizzie soon discovered that Mrs. Leonard was not altogether approved by her present visitors. She was willing to work like a horse, but she would not be put into harness for the vicar to drive. She would teach and preach, and even pray amongst the poor, according to her own light and her own judgment. Mr. Chester believed her to be a well-meaning and most charitable lady, but she had strange notions on the subject of individual responsibility, and was not to be guided by anyone, however clear might be that anyone's right and authority to guide her.

Mr. Chester sighed softly and compassionately in alluding to these delicate matters, and then he asked Lizzie whether she would honour him so far as to take a personal in-



terest in his schools, and come amongst them sometimes, when her other engagements would permit.

Lizzie said she should like it very much indeed, and entered so cordially into all the little plans for the benefit of his parishioners, which the Vicar detailed to her, that both husband and wife were charmed with the youthful lady at the Hall, and prolonged their visit till in truth their gentle hostess was growing ever so little tired of them.

They had scarcely departed when a carriage entered the lodge gates and rolled slowly up towards the house. Lizzie's colour, which had brightened somewhat during her long talk with Mr. and Mrs. Chester, faded almost entirely from her cheeks as she watched the approach of this vehicle. Her heart misgave her from the first as to its occupant, and it was consequently no surprise to her when the drawing-room door was thrown open and Mrs. Erskine announced.

A very stately lady with a hard, cold,

handsome face, which preserved its changeless calm while poor Lizzie was giving her a constrained and agitated greeting, and which seemed in its icy dignity to say—

“You poor little creature! how pitiable you are for not having yet learned to conceal all vulgar emotions under a polished and high bred mask, such as I am wearing.”

Her lips said—

“I am happy and honoured in making the acquaintance of Mrs. Frederick Leonard. Our dull county has long wanted the charm and grace of such a youthful presence in its high places. Let me hope that I am amongst the first to welcome you to Pengarthen.”

Lizzie bowed and smiled as courteously as she was able, and said she had not had many visitors at present. She regretted her husband's absence from home; he had gone out after luncheon with Mr. Erskine.

“Oh! Edward is here, is he?” the mother replied carelessly, “they are very old friends, my son and Mr. Leonard. You will find Ed-

ward charming ; he is universally sought after, and people esteem it quite a privilege to get him into their country houses. By the bye, I must not forget your kind invitation to myself through the medium of your husband. I regret that it will be out of my power to come this present week, but next week I am disengaged, and shall have great pleasure in joining your, no doubt, delightful party."

Again Lizzie could only bow, choke down the rising in her throat, and endeavour to look as little discomposed as possible. In a few minutes after this Mrs. Erskine rose, and naming her long drive as an apology for the shortness of her visit, took a stately leave of her heart weary hostess, and drove off with the pleasant consciousness of having put down for ever any possibility on the part of Sarah Anstruther's sister of resenting openly that old insult, or of making the honorable Edward's conduct a subject of unkind discussion in the neighbourhood.

The dinner went off much as the luncheon

had done, abundant and amusing conversation between the two gentlemen, and a well-bred effort on the part of the lady to appear interested in it. That she was sad and heavy of heart, even in the midst of her most successful smiles, Lizzie's face unmistakeably testified, and perhaps this was the reason why Frederick, who had no partiality either for women's tears or women's lectures, discovered that it would be impossible for him to take his wife for the walk he had himself suggested. So he kindly recommended her, as she looked pale, to have a turn or two on the terrace, and then invited Mr. Erskine to come and play a game of billiards in the library.

The latter invitation was accepted, but Lizzie did not go out on the terrace, and when tea time arrived the gentlemen had to partake of it alone, Isaure bringing a message that madame had a headache and would remain in her own room.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A WIFE ON THE RACK.

IF Frederick, when he came upstairs late that night and discovered his wife still sleepless, and with a very genuine pain in the head, had asked her what ailed her (though, of course, the question would have been superfluous) or alluded in even a remote way to the events of the past twelve hours, Lizzie would have opened all her heart to him, and told him that grieved and distressed as she had been at the want of consideration for her which he had manifested in the affair of the Erskines, she was infinitely more grieved and distressed at the idea of any coldness growing

up between themselves. She would have implored him to forgive her first instinctive resentment of his conduct, and to love her and suffer her to love him as if nothing having a tendency to estrange their hearts had happened.

Poor Lizzie, in her present state of sadness and desolation, would have said all this and more had the slightest opportunity for doing so been granted her; but Frederick liked his own comfort far too well to risk its disturbance by any fresh scenes or discussions with his wife. What he had done he had done, and what he meant to do he would do, though the sweet eyes he still warmly admired might become dim with weeping.

*Par préférence* he would have chosen that the lady who bore his name and shared his home should have been always gay and sunny tempered—but if to ensure this he would have to yield one iota of his own cherished will, or to abandon a single personal enjoyment, why then the lady, however fair or dear, must take

her chance. He could not be expected to sacrifice himself on her account, or to take it greatly to heart if she was less happy in bowing slavishly to his every whim than he really generously desired her to be.

So on the present occasion he appeared to think that his wife's head-ache could only be the result of her not having had the usual drive, promised her that it should not be neglected on the morrow, and then asked her, as if confident of a favourable answer, how she had liked Mrs. Erskine.

"She remained with me so short a time," Lizzie replied evasively (because she was really fearful now of displeasing her husband), "that I could not form any decided opinion of her. She is quite a contrast I am sure to Mrs. Leonard."

"To Mrs. Leonard!" exclaimed Frederick contemptuously (he could see now that his poor little wife had no idea of rebelling against him), "why what a childish observation, Lizzie. Whoever thought of instituting a

comparison between them? Mrs. Leonard is a half-crazed fanatic, pretending to have renounced the vanities of the world, when in point of fact it is the world that has renounced her. Mrs. Erskine is a lady of exquisite taste and refinement, a leader in fashionable society, and altogether a person whose acquaintance will be of great importance to you. I should wish her to be received when she comes to the Hall with every attention and distinction that may suggest themselves to you, as mistress of the house. By the bye, you wrote of course to Mrs. Lumley Rogers?"

"Yes."

Lizzie could not get beyond that simple affirmative now. She did not wish her husband to discover that he was adding to the pain both of head and heart by all he said, but her voice was such a weary one that it could not fail to strike him.

"I am tiring you," he considerably suggested, "and you ought to be going to sleep; only, lest I should forget it in the morning,



mind I want you the first thing to-morrow to send a very pressing invitation to the Clares—the two girls I mean—to come and spend a month with us. They are both very presentable, and sufficiently lively and agreeable for a country house. I think Fanny was fond of me, poor child! but if I'm tolerably kind to her I don't believe she'll poison you, Lisette. They ride well, those Clare girls, so I must go and see about some riding horses as soon as I can find time. We'll teach you, too, to become a horsewoman, little one! Erskine would make a capital master, he has such wonderful patience, and such a perfect knowledge of horses. He asked me to-day if you rode, and said it would amuse him immensely to teach you."

"Good night, Frederick," Lizzie wearily uttered in reply to this, and Frederick, suspecting that he had already helped to ensure a bad night for his uncomplaining wife, said pleasantly, "good night, my love," and went to sleep himself.

In a few more days—days of increasing heartache and heaviness to Lizzie, because she saw nothing of her husband except in the society of Edward Erskine, and this man's very presence in her home was a continual irritation to her;—in a few more days Pengarthen Hall was filled with pleasure loving, pleasure seeking guests, and its poor little mistress had to hide away all her own personal cares and anxieties, that she might give herself wholly to the unaccustomed task of devising amusements for a set of idlers whose only object in life appeared to be to kill time, and with it any sense they might once have had of their responsibilities and obligations as immortal creatures.

Mrs. Erskine, who had arrived on the day she herself appointed, was extremely gracious and patronizing to her young hostess. She saw at a glance how perfectly inexperienced Lizzie was in all the trying duties that now devolved upon her, and without in any way being appealed to for assistance, she managed

continually to come forward with her advice or suggestions at the very time when these were really of value, and just what was wanted to help Lizzie out of her manifold perplexities. Frederick, who often lost his temper when his wife's deficiency in worldly knowledge forced itself upon his notice, told her, day after day, that she could never be grateful enough to Mrs. Erskine for all she did for her; and Lizzie, feeling the obligation she was thus placed under, had no choice but to repay it by every external mark of attention and respect, though all the while she despised herself for what she was doing.

Writing to Sarah, the real bitterness of her spirit in her present bondage, oozed out in the following sentence :

"As you will certainly hear it soon from others, I had better tell you at once that, amongst the visitors at the Hall are Mrs. and Mr. Erskine. I did not even know till we came down here, that they were personal friends of Frederick's. Darling, I resisted

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their introduction to me all I could—it made me wretched even to contemplate it; but my husband pleaded the old friendship, could not enter into *my* feelings on the subject, and so had his way. Independently of past associations, I should never have liked Mrs. Erskine—she is cold and haughty in the extreme, but forces me to be more than ordinarily polite to her, by constantly advising and directing me in matters concerning which I am really woefully ignorant. I shall be so glad when Mrs. Lumley Rogers arrives—I feel so friendless amongst all these gay people—and I do believe she likes me. I cannot snatch a moment of any day to get to Mrs. Leonard again; and if I could, where would be the use? Our lives, our pursuits, our hopes and aims are so very, very different.”

Unfortunately for Lizzie’s present wishes, Mrs. Lumley Rogers was not a woman to go anywhere the moment she was asked for. This was not from coquetry or a foolish desire to make herself appear of great importance;

but simply that, while society was doing its very best to draw her into its midst, she had a constant yearning for solitude and retirement, and a settled persuasion that the occasional enjoyment of this was essential, both to her physical and mental health. She had promised the Leonards to join them as soon as they should be settled in Cornwall; but immediately after their departure from London she discovered that the season's gaieties had been too much for her; and shutting up her town house, turning a deaf ear to all the sympathizing friends who implored her to come and nurse herself, and be as quiet as she pleased with them, this very independent lady took train alone to one of the least fashionable of the London suburbs, and, in a modest lodging where nobody would think of looking for her, devoted herself to the intellectual studies she really preferred before any of the senseless, soulless gaieties in which she had lately borne a part. To the Leonards, in reply to their urgent invitation, she wrote:—

“Do not, dear friends, think me ungrateful or capricious, when I implore you to leave me for a few weeks in peace. Exhausted nature has compelled me to rush into my present retreat, where I see absolutely nobody, except my landlady and my doctor—the dearest and most considerate of men—who vows that nothing but the step I have taken could have saved me, either physically or mentally, and that I am not to move again without his word of command. Seriously, though, I will come to you the moment I have sufficiently recruited my wasted powers of body and mind; till when and always I am,

“Yours very faithfully and gratefully,

“A. L. R.”

“Hang it!” Mr. Leonard had exclaimed, after reading this unsatisfactory epistle—  
“why did she promise to come if she meant to serve me such a trick as this. As if I should believe that stuff about exhausted nature and absolute solitude. It’s very hard

that the only woman I really want just now can't be got. I don't believe, Lizzie, that you wrote a sufficiently pressing letter."

Poor Lizzie! but she bore this too without a word of reproach, only fetching her desk and begging her husband to glance over the copy (fortunately preserved) of what she had really written.

This had occurred more than a week before she dispatched to her sister the letter from which an extract has been given; nevertheless, Lizzie had been quite sincere in saying that she longed for Mrs. Lumley Rogers's arrival. She longed for it because, as she had told Sarah, she believed in that lady's professions of friendship for herself, and remembered, with singular satisfaction, something Mrs. Lumley had once said to her about flirtations with other women's husbands. Frederick might warmly admire the attractive widow whom all men more or less admired, but *her* principles being firm, *her* self respect unquestionable, there would never be any

fear of his admiration passing the bounds of strict propriety or interfering with his loyalty to his wife.

It must not be supposed that Lizzie even to herself acknowledged fully that there was any need to calculate in this way, or that she encouraged in the very slightest degree one thought that could wrong her husband. She still believed, as firmly as she ever believed, in her own entire and exclusive possession of his *heart*, understanding by that somewhat vague term the best and most sacred portion of his nature which, in Lizzie's innocent creed, was incapable of being influenced, or even remotely touched by the vain and frivolous emotions that give rise to what the world calls flirtations. Once she would have indignantly repudiated the idea of her husband, her beloved and honoured husband, stooping to what she considered so unworthy and degrading a pastime, but experience was teaching her many unwelcome lessons, and amongst the rest that her Frederick must



have amusement at any rate—any cost alas! of pain to the true wife, who would have judged herself far more severely than she judged him, could the greatest temptation have led her to listen with satisfaction to words of even idle gallantry from other men.

“You will get used to all this in time,” Mrs. Erskine had said jestingly to Lizzie on one occasion, when her watchful eyes had detected signs of strong emotions in the wife’s face, while her husband was devoting himself openly and assiduously to Frances Clare. “What can a man do, a man of tender, chivalrous feeling like Mr. Leonard, when a young lady not deficient in attractions shows so plainly that she admires him? These flirtations mean nothing, I assure you, and if they did, the very worst policy on your part would be to show that you cared a straw about them. Your susceptibility of feeling will wear you to the bone in less than a twelvemonth.”

Lizzie winced under such speeches as these,

and hated herself for not being better able to conceal her sufferings—but she was very young, and unbounded love and indulgence had weakened her nature, and altogether unfitted it for that life-battle which every human being must fight alone. She had a little spirit in her too, though it was not strong enough to do more than occasionally peep out of the indignant eyes, and add now and then a brighter flush to the rose-tinted cheek. It had never yet given words, such as jealous wives think it no shame to use, to the well guarded tongue—and yet the temptation to speak bitterly and hotly had not been wanting, and each day as it passed increased her provocations, and widened the gulf that had opened, she scarcely knew how, between herself and her husband.

“Set up an opposition, my dear,” Mrs. Erskine, still laughingly, had whispered to her unhappy little hostess on another occasion. “Leave your incorrigible husband (who is really the most dangerous of men), to ride

as much and as long as he pleases with pretty Fanny Clare, and allow Edward, who doesn't care two straws for any of the girls here, to procure a quiet horse for you, and teach you to ride. The exercise will be so good for you—do you know you are growing quite pale and thin?—and I shouldn't wonder if this brought Mr. Frederick and Miss Fanny to their senses. What do you say to my suggestion?"

"I have no wish to learn to ride, thank you," Lizzie answered, in a choking voice—"and I have never disputed my husband's right to please himself in all things. Pray don't imagine I am jealous of Frances Clare."

This last clause of the poor wife's simple and (alas for her dignity!) tearful speech, was prompted by the spirit before alluded to. It rose up suddenly, made its foolish protest, and then, ashamed of being detected in an untruth, sank quickly down again, and was heard of, for that night at least, no more.

Mrs. Erskine smiled benevolently and pityingly (in her sleeve she laughed to a most unladylike extent,) and said, patting Lizzie's crimson cheek:

"Jealous, no, of course not. It is only cooks and housemaids who are guilty of such a vulgar sentiment. We of the upper ten thousand know better than to risk our good looks and appetites by such destructive emotions. There is Alice Clare going to the piano for the sole purpose one would imagine of frightening people out of the room. Give me your arm, my dear, and let us have a turn on the lawn."

It was an amusement to this grand lady—wearied of all ordinary entertainments—to watch the progress of the sorrow that was eating into poor Lizzie's heart. She had never been troubled with any stormy emotions of her own, had scarcely indeed believed in their existence, but this little wife's transparent soul battling vainly with its cruel pain, was like a new and very interesting book to her,

and so she read it daily, leaf after leaf, and congratulated herself, like the boys with the toad, on having discovered at last something really sensitive to pain which she might throw stones at, and torture further at her will.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE GARDENER'S NONPAREIL.

THE want of time was not the only thing that kept Lizzie from paying a second visit to Mrs. Leonard. She felt intuitively that that lady's powers of observation and discernment were very keen indeed; and in the wife's strong yearning for sympathy and kindness, for something that should counterbalance the cold probing of her wound which she had to endure day after day from Mrs. Erskine, she knew that the temptation would be very great to respond to the first gentle word of enquiry as to her changed looks by a full

outpouring of all her aching and sorrowful heart.

This would naturally not tend to raise her husband in his step-mother's esteem. Lizzie more than suspected that his place in it was a very low one already; and so the faithful little wife resolved as long as she could to avoid adding by her own accusing face to the strong testimony she was nearly sure existed even now in Mrs. Leonard's mind against him.

Nevertheless her thoughts, such of them at least as she could spare from her personal anxieties, were very often with the cheerful, active, self-denying woman whose life offered such a strange contrast to the lives of all the other present inmates of the Hall—of her own, as much as any, Lizzie was quite ready to confess—and amongst these thoughts was a constantly recurring one on the subject of Mrs. Leonard's apparent poverty, and a kind, girlish wish that she might venture to supply her scantily furnished rooms with the conve-

niences and comforts that were so manifestly lacking in them.

How to do it delicately and without wounding the probably susceptible feelings of the receiver was the great question that Lizzie had to ponder; but a bright inspiration came to her one day when she had gone to gather some flowers in the conservatory.

The head gardener happened to look in while she was there, and Lizzie immediately began asking him about several choice plants, with whose names she was unfamiliar. The man, who was not a little proud of two or three successful experiments he had lately made in mingling new colours in some of the rarest exotics, gladly answered all his youthful mistress's questions, and then exultingly drew her attention to one particular plant now only in bud, on which he had been lavishing all his skill, and which promised when fully blown to rival everything of the kind that had ever yet been exhibited.

In form and colour it was to bear a great



resemblance to the pale rose camellia; but in addition to this it would have the most exquisite perfume, and be altogether, the self-satisfied Scotchman declared, a perfect nonpareil.

"Keep it for me, Humphreys," Lizzie said, after she had duly praised the industry and cleverness thus forced upon her notice. "I want a little present for a lady, and this will do beautifully. Now, mind, you watch over it with the greatest care, and whoever may come to you for flowers, tell them that this particular one is already bespoken."

The well pleased Humphreys promised faithfully to do his lady's bidding, and Lizzie walked away satisfied that she had hit upon the very thing with which to feel her ground, and introduce her intended donations to Mrs. Leonard. A flower was such a simple, graceful offering, and yet as this was a very rare one it would enable her to judge how far she might venture for the time to come.

About a week after this, and when in the

daily recurring vexations and bitternesses which seemed inseparable from her lot, Lizzie had almost forgotten both Mrs. Leonard and the present she was intending to make her, a circumstance occurred, which brought back her thoughts to the subject of the gardener's pet flower in a manner very far from agreeable.

She had gone down one evening into the drawing-room rather earlier than usual, before any of the other ladies had left their dressing-rooms, and as it was very warm, threatening indeed for a thunder storm, Lizzie chose a seat close to the open French window, which was shaded by ample curtains of silk and muslin, and where consequently she was hidden from anyone entering at the other end of the room. If the truth must be told, she knew that her husband was still somewhere in the grounds about the house, and not having seen Frances Clare come in with the rest of the party, who had been amusing themselves

on the lake, she strongly suspected that this young lady was his companion.

It was undoubtedly very foolish of her to sit there watching, as that little spirit within her was not half brave enough to have uttered its protest aloud, even had she seen them come in together; but wives who believe themselves aggrieved will do very silly things, and above all, will never refrain from drinking as much as they possibly can of the poison that is destroying them.

But while Lizzie's eager eyes were still strained to catch the first glimmer of a white dress amongst the dark trees that bordered the lawn, the door at the other end of the room opened suddenly, and rustling silks proclaimed the arrival of some of the ladies from upstairs. The young hostess breathed a decidedly impatient sigh, rose from her seat, and was just coming forward, when the voice of Alice Clare addressing her sister—the sister for whom Lizzie had been so anxiously

watching—fell upon her ear, and detained her in her hiding place.

“Nobody down yet, I declare, Fan, and we thought we were late. Now you *shall* tell me where you got that exquisite flower, or I will do mischief. I don’t care a bit if Edward Erskine gave it to you—I do believe he admires you very much—but, if it was Fred, why, I must say, Fanny, you have no right to wear it in your hair. He is a shameless flirt, and though I am sure you mean no harm, you are both of you together making poor Lizzie miserable. There must really come a stop to this, or I shall write to mama and tell her to send for us home.”

“Oh pray don’t worry me with your elder sister’s lectures,” replied Frances a little petulantly. “I suppose I know what I am about, and can take care of myself without your interference. Frederick and I were always good friends—we suit each other in so many ways—but I am sure if Lizzie is jealous it is very ridiculous of her. She had much

better be jealous of that marvellously handsome house-keeper."

"Of whom you are jealous, I suppose, Fan, or such an idea would not have entered your head. Well, how any woman in her senses can care two straws for a vain, selfish man like Frederick Leonard, I cannot conceive. Anyhow, you are not going to break your heart about him—I am too fond of my wilful little sister to permit such a thing as that—so we will just make some excuse and return quietly to Linden Park; do you hear, Fan?"

"Yes; I am not deaf, Alice, thank you, but I don't mean to leave all these nice people yet. Why, if you care for me as you say you do, you would be glad to give me a chance of winning the honourable Edward Erskine. I am twenty-one and a half, my dear, and it is quite time that I was settled in life."

"Fanny, nobody would rejoice more than myself to see you well and happily married,"

Alice said, now, with increasing seriousness; "but I am sure you would not accept Edward Erskine if he were to propose to you to-morrow; and though I would infinitely rather have you marry even him, than continue your present infatuation about Frederick Leonard, still I don't really like the man for the heartless way in which he jilted poor Sarah Anstruther. He would probably grow tired of his wife in even less time than it has taken Fred to do so."

"I quite agree with you, Alice, and therefore—"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in the noise produced by the abrupt entrance of two or three more ladies all talking and laughing together; and under cover of the confusion thus made in the room, Lizzie slipped quietly out of the window and crept along, as near to the sheltering wall as she could, till there was no fear of her being detected by the merry party she had quitted.

To have faced any one of them just then,

she felt would have been a moral impossibility without betraying the terrible agitation excited by the conversation she had overheard. Besides, she wanted to make quite sure before she confronted Frances Clare and her husband, as to whether the flower in that young lady's hair, which her sister had so highly extolled, was really the flower destined as her own gift to Mrs. Leonard.

As fast as her trembling limbs would permit—the little spirit had risen, like a coward as it was, now that there was nobody to witness its rage, and was quivering and palpitating all over—as fast then as her trembling limbs would permit, Lizzie hastened to the large conservatory, knocked down several plants in her eagerness to reach the spot where she knew her flower had stood, and found that its one perfect blossom had been stolen.

For a few seconds she stood with tearless eyes and burning cheeks contemplating the despoiled exotic, as if her looking at it would

bring back what it had lost, or alter the state of things which had led to the cruel appropriation of her treasure. Then, abruptly turning away with a startled remembrance that she would be missed as soon as dinner was announced, her eyes fell upon the rueful and penitent face of Humphreys the gardener.

"Oh, Humphreys! it is gone, my beautiful flower that I was so anxious about—how could you let it be taken from you?"

Lizzie had an uneasy consciousness that her aspect must be betraying even to this man, some of the aching pain that was in her heart, and so she spoke out whatever came first into her head, and tried to get up a semblance of anger against Humphreys.

"I did my best, ma'am, indeed," he replied in a respectful and sorrowful tone, "and I'm more put out about it than any one else can be. It only blowed this morning, and I was coming up to the house with it myself in the afternoon. I had set it apart for the purpose, and was just thinking I never did see any-



thing so perfect, when Mr. Leonard looked in—you know, ma'am, in general he takes no interest in the flowers—and asked me if I had something particular choice that would look well in a lady's hair ; ma'am, I stood right before this new blown gem of mine just that he mightn't set eyes upon it, and I showed him a lot of camellias, and blush roses, and cape jessamines, and all sorts. However, he couldn't suit himself, and said they was all too common, and that I didn't understand my business. And then, ma'am my pride was touched, I confess it, and I just moved aside and let him see the gem, and no sooner had he seen it than he feels in his pocket for a knife, saying, 'this will do, Humphreys,' and while I was telling him he couldn't have it by no means, that I was bound to keep it for you, he snips it off the stem, laughs, and carries it away. Indeed, ma'am, it was no fault of mine. I am altogether upset about it—but I'll do my best to rear you another in a month's time."

"Thank you, Humphreys," Lizzie replied in a subdued voice—"but it is of no consequence now. I did not know that Mr. Leonard had taken it; of course he had a right to do so. Good evening."

During dinner that day it was observed that Mrs. Leonard had an unusually brilliant colour, and that she talked and laughed much more than she was in the habit of doing. Even Edward Erskine came in for a share of her graciousness and affability, and her husband amongst the rest looked often at her in pure astonishment. When the beauty of the flower in Fanny Clare's dark hair became a subject of general comment, Lizzie was the first to point out how admirably it suited her style of face, and all through the evening she kept up her wonderful acting in a manner that astonished herself, but which was in fact only a terrified compliance with the dictates of the little impotent spirit that fancied it had plucked up an atom of real courage at last.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## FANNY CLARE'S DIAMOND BRACELET.

THE next morning Frederick and Edward Erskine rode over together to Penzance, and did not return till quite late in the evening. The thunder-storm which had been threatening all the day before had come on furiously during the afternoon, and some of the ladies were frightened, and inclined to get up a scene of hysterics on the occasion. Lizzie was a little anxious on her husband's account, because she knew that the horse he rode was a skittish one, but she kept her fears to herself, and endeavoured to the best of her ability to calm the agitations of such of her

guests as were really personally alarmed at the thunder storm.

Only in the case of Frances Clare, who made more fuss than any of them, did she manifest total indifference. It was not her place to soothe the woman whose vanity and want of principle were interfering so cruelly with her own happiness. There was Alice to reason with her if her professions of nervousness were genuine, and if this nervousness had, as Lizzie suspected, reference rather to Frederick than to herself, so much the less was she, his wife, called upon to discuss or meddle with it.

When the gentlemen at last arrived safe and sound, except for a good drenching, the whole party were unanimous in their congratulations and rejoicings. The storm had passed over, too, now, and everybody was inclined to make light of those recent fears which had been grave enough to reduce nearly a dozen women to almost total silence while the thunder and lightning continued.

"I don't believe," said Mrs. Erskine, who had neither been alarmed herself, nor condescended to take the slightest notice of the alarm of her companions, "that any one amongst us has really suffered except Fanny Clare. She, poor child, has certainly exhibited a pitiable amount of cowardice, but Mrs. Leonard has been indefatigable in her exertions to keep us all in order. We owe her a vote of thanks at the very least, and Miss Fanny, as the most indebted, ought to be the spokeswoman of the company."

"I?" exclaimed Frances, suddenly looking up, and emitting from her dark eyes a few sparks of indignation, "you are labouring under some mistake, Mrs. Erskine. I am not aware of having been once addressed by Mrs. Leonard since breakfast time. The other ladies may have benefited by her praiseworthy attempts to preach courage to them, but for myself, I had not the chance. However," she added boldly, though her voice shook a very little, "I was not frightened

on my own account, so it did not signify."

With these words, the reckless, infatuated girl, rose abruptly, and without saying good-night to anybody, went away to her own room.

Alice, looking distressed and ashamed, soon followed her sister, and the gentlemen confessing themselves tired, the whole party not long after broke up and separated to their respective dormitories.

Lizzie was still in her dressing-room, though Isaure had for some time been dismissed, when Frederick came up-stairs. He knocked at his wife's door—surprised probably at not finding her in bed and asleep—and received instant permission to enter.

"What's the matter, Lizzie, that you are not in bed?" he asked, peering a little curiously into her raised face. "I thought you were looking more tired than any of them."

A sudden flush of gladness came to the

wife's cheek at this simple assertion that her husband had taken note of her appearance—it was many and many a day since he had seemed to know or care how she looked or how she felt—and she replied quite gratefully—

“I did feel tired, dear, before I left the drawing-room, but it went off as soon as I was alone. How came you to observe me so narrowly?”

“How came I to observe you so narrowly? Why, you little goose, don't you think I always observe you narrowly?” he said, lightly; “besides, Edward drew my attention to your white face, and told me that he thought so many women were too much for you. Are you sick of your friends, Lizzie. Should you like to be alone again?”

“Oh, Frederick!”

She paused, for her eyes were full of tears and her voice so broken that she dared not trust it further. Could he really mean that he was going to consult her wishes, to

deprive himself for her sake of the people whose society she had believed indispensable to his happiness, to begin with her in their beautiful home, the quiet, rational life she had an ever-increasing yearning for—or was he only teasing her, trying how much her already injured temper could endure?

When her voice failed her after the pathetic “Oh Frederick!” she stood up and put one arm about her husband’s neck. He looked at her in very evident admiration for a few minutes, then kissed her, laughed, and said—

“Don’t you know, little one, how very much prettier you are than Fanny Clare, or than any of the women we have about us here? There is no danger of my falling in love with them while you excel them so greatly in personal charms—only don’t let jealousy or any childish nonsense of that sort rob you of your good looks—that would be just what I never could forgive. By and bye, after Christmas, Lisette, we really will manage to have a week to ourselves, that we may recruit



for the London season. Now keep away those naughty tears—I abominate crying women—and see what I have brought you.”

He took from his pocket a morocco case, and opening it, displayed an emerald brooch of very perfect workmanship.

“This is to pay you for the flower which, it seems, I robbed you of yesterday, Lisette. I know you don’t care for jewels, as some women do, but you will value this as my peace offering, and let it keep you from all ridiculous jealousy of other women for the future. Is it an agreement?”

“Dear, dear Frederick—!”

“Well, be a good girl, and you will always find me kind and affectionate to you. I am awfully sleepy, so we won’t sentimentalize any more to-night. You like your brooch, don’t you?”

“Very, very much. I did not believe you would have thought of such a thing as paying me for that foolish flower. All the flowers in the world would be as nothing to me

in comparison with one kind word or look of yours, Frederick. Dear, you know I have not had too many of these of late; but I shall sleep so well to-night."

Poor child! it needed not the revelation made by those heavy eyes of hers to understand all that this simple, glad assertion implied. The husband only laughed, said again she was a little goose, and then went to his own dressing-room.

Lizzie's prayers that night were breathed from a grateful heart, which was still, alas! too wedded to its earthly love to have anything more than the vaguest and most transitory yearnings towards the Heaven they were intended to reach.

Mrs. Erskine was to leave Pengarthen Hall the next day—this was another source of real satisfaction to poor Lizzie, whose uneasiness in reference to Frances Clare would never have arrived at its present pitch but for that lady's constant efforts to draw her attention to what was going on. Mrs. Erskine was as-

tonished at her young hostess's improved looks and spirits on the morning succeeding the thunderstorm—she would not believe that her own approaching departure was the sole cause of so great a change. That *some* portion of Lizzie's gladness was attributable to this she did not doubt, and the conviction spurred her on to the amiable intention of discovering the source of the other half, and if possible of counteracting it.

A parting stone flung at the poor little helpless creature, who had already writhed under so many of her blows, would be excellent fun, and serve to amuse her as a subject of mirthful thought during her lonely journey home

The honorable Edward had not yet had enough of Pengarthen and his old friend's society. When he had, he would join his mother in their own ancestral halls. Both mother and son always made a point of doing exactly what suited them best, without any reference to the wants or wishes of the other.

So Mrs. Erskine was very busy all that day until the evening; and then, just before dinner, (she was to leave soon after), when Lizzie was doing her very best to be gracious and amiable to her departing visitor, the visitor secretly picked up her stone, and flung it right at the heart of her unsuspecting victim.

“That is an uncommonly pretty brooch you are wearing to-day, my dear,” she said, taking up her jewelled eye glass to examine Frederick’s gift to his wife—“something new, is it not? I think I have rarely seen finer emeralds, only they should have the addition of the brilliants to set them off to full advantage. Fanny Clare’s bracelet, now, is perfect; you have seen it of course? She was showing it to a favoured few when I came into the drawing-room, after my drive; but I observe she is not wearing it yet—young ladies like to admire their new ornaments a little while in their velvet cases, before they put them on. Was your brooch a gift from Mr. Leonard?”

"Yes," said Lizzie, striving vainly to speak indifferently, or to conceal the changes that had passed over her face while Mrs. Erskine was addressing her—"he bought it for me at Penzance, yesterday."

"How very nice and lover-like of him, and what exquisite taste he has displayed, both in this and—but I really beg your pardon, my dear; I am detaining you most unwarrantably from your other guests, and there is Edward, in particular, looking daggers at me. I shall go over and have a parting chat with Mr. Leonard, at the risk of making myself hateful to Miss Fanny, who, by the bye, has no right to monopolize the master of the house so entirely."

As this cheerful lady sailed away to the opposite end of the room, Lizzie, with a burning heart and cheek, sought Alice Clare, whom she had observed, a few minutes before, going alone with a book into the inner drawing-room.

Alice must have been very deeply absorbed

in her studies, though the book was only a novel, to judge by the start she gave as Lizzie came suddenly and laid her trembling hand upon her shoulder.

"You, Lizzie?" she said, looking up, and looking embarrassed too. "I thought you were engaged in entertaining that very unpleasant and unsociable Mrs. Erskine. I have got hold of a book I have long been wanting to read, and so I ran in here to hide myself till dinner time."

"Alice," began Lizzie, her colour fading rapidly as she spoke, "I have come to ask you a question, to ask you also to let both question and answer, whatever that answer may be, remain a secret between us. Will you promise me this?"

After a second or two's hesitation, and with a deepening red on her face, Alice said, "Yes, certainly, Lizzie."

"Tell me then how your sister came by the diamond and emerald bracelet of which

Mrs. Erskine has been speaking to me. Did Frederick give it to her yesterday?"

"He gave it to her this morning."

The words were uttered slowly and reluctantly (for Alice loved her sister dearly, and hated to have to confess anything that would condemn her), and the eyes of the speaker were bent on the ground as she delivered her accusing testimony. Lizzie was quite silent for a minute or so after receiving this answer. Her heart beat too quickly to permit of her trusting her voice just at present; but, by and bye, she said—

"Thank you, Alice, and mind you remember your promise."

"Stop one moment, Lizzie," exclaimed Alice, as the wife was turning to leave the room. "I must implore you not to judge poor Fanny harshly in this matter. She did not wish to accept the bracelet; she refused at first positively to do so. I was in the room at the time, only Frederick would not

be denied ; he urged his distant relationship to us, his long acquaintance, their old friendship, and the prospect of our soon returning home. Indeed, indeed, Lizzie, we are going next week. I have written to tell mama to send for us. Poor Fanny has been weak and foolish, I know, but you must remember that she had learned to like Frederick long before he married you, and she thought the old friendship might still innocently exist between them. Try to forgive her, Lizzie, and to trust me for keeping her away from you and your husband for the future."

Lizzie was spared the necessity of replying to this sisterly defence of one whom, as a wife and a pure woman, she could not very readily excuse, by the entrance of Edward Erskine, and his announcement that the rest of the party had been summoned to dinner. He had an arm for each of the ladies he had come to seek, but only Alice availed herself of his politeness, Mrs. Frederick Leonard choosing to follow alone.



As long as Mrs. Erskine's cruel eyes were upon her Lizzie managed to keep up a semblance of cheerfulness and indifference, but it bore too little likeness to the cheerfulness of the early part of the day to deceive so acute a personage as the one on whose behalf it was attempted. Altogether, she was thoroughly satisfied with the success of her endeavours to shake the poor wife out of the dream in which she had foolishly and ignorantly been indulging. Apart from her sin of being young and lovely, Mrs. Frederick Leonard was guilty of the still greater sin of being Sarah Anstruther's sister, Sarah Anstruther having been convicted of the heinous offence of causing the Honourable Edward Erskine (in certain societies which clung to old-fashioned prejudices regarding manly honour) to be evil spoken of, and shunned in a most unjust and arbitrary way.

Poor Sarah would have contemplated the ravages of the malady which had stricken her, with far keener distress than she had yet,

in spite of all its consequences, done, could she have foreseen that it would have entailed upon her innocent sister the enmity of a woman who had both the power and the opportunity to make that enmity felt.

The first thing that Lizzie did after she had seen her guest depart, was to fly to her own room and take off the brooch she had put on so proudly and gladly a few hours before. If Frederick missed it and questioned her concerning it, she would tell him frankly what she had heard about the bracelet, and wherefore, with the knowledge of that gift concealed from her by him, she could take no further pleasure in her own. If he did not miss it, then Lizzie resolved to bury this new wrong in her already deeply wounded heart, and to endure her martyrdom as patiently as she could until Alice redeemed her promise and took Frances home.

As the brooch was not missed nor enquired for at all again by the inconstant giver, Lizzie kept her resolution and went on from

day to day with the arrow cleaving to her quivering flesh, and the smile on her lips becoming more and more the smile of the hypocrite—such hypocrites as wrong and cruelty make of women whose tender and passionate love is thrown back to them with indifference or scorn.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A VISIT TO THE HANDSOME HOUSEKEEPER.

FRANCES CLARE had taken cold. It was not indeed a very serious affair, nor one that need have excited the smallest uneasiness in the minds of her most devoted friends, but the young lady chose to make an important matter of it, and to keep her room in consequence for two or three days. As she had her sister to nurse and fuss over her—Alice was lamentably weak where Fanny was concerned—it might reasonably have been expected that the rest of the party at the Hall would have been free from anxiety on the invalid's account, and that she would have

been suffered to indulge her whim without interference or molestation of any kind.

Such, however, was by no means the case.

The master of the house, either was, or pretended to be, deeply concerned at the temporary indisposition and retirement of his fair guest. He did nothing but send messages, or bouquets of flowers, or the choicest fruit to the interesting invalid during the whole day, and Lizzie was kept in a state of perpetual irritation by his repeated entreaties that she would attend herself to the poor dear girl, and not neglect ordering anything that could possibly do her the slightest good.

It was through this illness of Fanny Clare's that Lizzie was brought for the third time in contact with Leah Ash.

Happening to know of a very excellent kind of jelly which her mother had been in the habit of making for poor Willie in his frequent illnesses, Lizzie thought one morn-

ing she would go down herself to the house-keeper's room and consult with Leah about it. Strange as it may appear, the mistress of Pengarthen Hall had never yet been in the lower part of her own house, and great was her astonishment when on being guided by Isaure to Miss Ash's especial domain, she found a room, (at present unoccupied), nearly as elegantly furnished as her own boudoir, with music, embroidery, and even painting materials, scattered in all directions, such as an accomplished lady, with abundance of time upon her hands, might have left about.

Isaure smiled knowingly and a little sarcastically at her young mistress's evident surprise. Her look expressed—"I might have told you all this and more if you had not discouraged my every attempt to talk to you about the household."

All Lizzie said even now, was—"You had better find Miss Ash, Isaure, and tell her I am waiting for her here."

When Leah came in about five minutes

after this, her countenance betrayed neither embarrassment nor vexation. She was looking just as placid and dignified as Lizzie had hitherto seen her look, and her tone was quietly respectful as she enquired, (having first offered a low, easy chair to her mistress), what particular service was at present demanded of her.

"Oh, I only came to talk to you about a jelly I want made to-day for Miss Clare," Lizzie replied, endeavouring to recover from her first mystification—"but what pretty things you have collected round you here, Leah! I have been admiring your room immensely. Do you really play, and draw, and sing yourself?"

"I have learnt to do all," Leah said calmly, "but I am not a proficient in any. I keep them up as well as I can because they may be useful to me one of these days. The lady who adopted me when I was a child gave me a good education, believing, I imagine, that I should be settled somehow before she died.

This not being the case she left me what she was able—a hundred pounds in money, and the furniture of the room that had been mine in her house. As it was quite out of place in a farm, I have had it brought here; it is what you see.”

“But how came you not to think of going out as governess instead of taking a situation which—which is certainly beneath you?” Lizzie added frankly, and with growing interest in the very beautiful woman she addressed.

“I am not fond of children,” Leah said, “and at present I should not consider myself justified in attempting to teach young ladies—may I take your directions now, ma’am, concerning the jelly?”

If this was a hint that the subject had been sufficiently discussed, Lizzie was slow to act upon it.

“Poor Leah!” she exclaimed out of the fullness of her warm, sympathising heart—“I



do not like the idea of your being only a housekeeper."

She did not look at her companion as she spoke—had she done so she would have thought at once that pity of any kind was not the offering most acceptable to the stately Leah. A third person coming into the room at that moment and gazing at the two, would certainly have supposed that the expression of compassion had fallen from the lips of the housekeeper, and been directed to her pale little mistress, who was all unconscious both of the annoyance her sympathy was giving to Leah, and of the earnest scrutiny which that individual was just now bestowing upon herself.

When she turned her half averted face back towards her companion, the latter said:

"I like it, ma'am, thank you. It was quite my own choice to come."

"Well, then, we must be content, I suppose, to leave things as they are at present," con-

tinued Lizzie, with fifty schemes beginning to develop themselves in her busy little head for Leah's future benefit—"but you must let me pay you a visit here occasionally. I should so like you to play and sing to me."

Now, for the first time since the commencement of their interview, Miss Ash's expressive countenance underwent a marked change. Her wonderful eyes flashed with a dangerous looking fire, her cheeks lost the bright red which usually distinguished them, her mouth took curves which plainly showed the woman's will if not her power to smite mercilessly any one who had injured or insulted her, and when she spoke it was in a low, suppressed tone, that startled and almost frightened her hearer.

"You are very, very good, ma'am, and I should, on my own account, feel honoured by your visits, but Mr. Leonard would strongly object to anything of the kind. He has a marked dislike *to the inferior classes*, and would consider his wife degraded by the most

casual voluntary association with her house-keeper, the daughter of Jabez Ash, a farmer on his estate. Forgive me, now, if I ask you to let us speak about the jelly."

This time Lizzie was not disposed to resist Leah's plainly-expressed desire to change the subject, but many new and exciting thoughts were in her mind as she gave the simple directions requisite for the concoction of the little delicacy which was to assist in soothing Fanny Clare's apparently obstinate cough.

Leah only asked when all was told—"Is it for Miss Clare alone that the jelly is intended?" and Lizzie, supposing that her inquiry had reference to the quantity that would be needed, said, "It is for Miss Frances Clare, who has been confined to her room for several days with a bad cold on the chest; but make plenty, as I know it is good, and I think she will like it."

Leah promised full obedience to these orders—her countenance had recovered its

ordinary sedateness by this time—and then Lizzie, resisting a very strong inclination to shake hands with her interesting housekeeper, went away to her uninteresting guests upstairs.

The next day was Sunday, and when Mrs. Frederick Leonard, ready dressed for church, which she never missed, went into the drawing-room to inquire how many of the other ladies intended accompanying her, she found to her great surprise that her husband, who had not been inside the church since their arrival at Pengarthen, was standing with hat, and even prayer book in hand, prepared to make one of the party.

An emotion of sudden and very earnest gladness was visible in the wife's face, and audible in the tones of her voice as she said—

“ Oh, Frederick, how pleased I am to see this. You did not tell me at breakfast time that you had any thoughts of going. Thank you, dear.”

For naturally her first impulse was to

believe that her husband was making this quite extraordinary effort by way of giving her pleasure—Lizzie having, ever since their marriage, tried every method that suggested itself to her for getting Frederick to attend a place of worship.

He had the grace to look a little confused as his wife now spoke her artless acknowledgments for a supposed kindness to herself, but, as usual, he laughed it off, and said—

“Oh, I don’t think I deserve any large amount of gratitude. It is such a splendid day, Lizzie, and the carriage will just hold us four.”

“What four? I have not heard yet who are going. Indeed I reckoned upon being alone to-day, as the Clares are generally my only companions in the morning, and I thought Alice would have remained, on this occasion, with her sister.”

“Frances is going too, I believe,” Frederick answered, with his back turned to his wife; “she thinks as the day is so warm it cannot

possibly hurt her—at least so Alice said just now. Of course I have not seen her.”

A swelling rose in poor Lizzie’s throat, and some indignant tears to her eyes, but she spoke no more till she was seated beside her husband, and face to face with Frances Clare, in the carriage.

Then she talked to each of her companions almost as quietly and naturally as she would have done had her aching heart been at rest, and if for a moment Frederick had felt compunction at the idea of having given her pain, he had every reason now (apart from conscience and common sense, neither of which he was in the habit of listening to) to feel at ease on the subject.

If gross selfishness ever can be extenuated, perhaps it may be accepted as some slight extenuation of the selfishness of Frederick Leonard that its very completeness made him quite unmindful of the probable consequences to others of any line of conduct his inclination for the moment prompted him to pursue.

In encouraging, and apparently reciprocating the too evident admiration of the weak-minded Frances Clare, he was so far guiltless of a desire to annoy his unoffending wife that, except on those rare occasions when something she said or did awakened him to a consciousness of her pain, he literally forgot that she had either a right or a reason to take umbrage at the insult he was offering her.

Some men can really do this when the predominant and unchecked passions of their natures are roused, and Frederick Leonard, as I have said, was one of them.

Let wives judge whether it would have consoled Lizzie to know that her husband, instead of *intending* to insult her, and wring the poor heart already too familiar with this species of torture, only forgot her entirely in the absorbing interest of his newest pastime.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE BASKET OF EARLY GRAPES.

THE day which opened so brightly clouded suddenly over before the service had well begun, and by the time it was finished the rain was coming down in torrents, and the atmosphere had grown chill and miserable in the extreme.

Even inside the little church they were conscious of the change, and Fanny Clare had two or three fits of rather severe coughing, which elicited the most anxious looks from her sister, and the most sympathising ones from Frederick, who sat next to her and read out of the same book.



Lizzie never raised her eyes when once she had seated herself in her usual place, but in all probability she knew what was going on, as wives do come to know all those small matters which have reference to their husband's attentions to other women.

As they were leaving the church she looked about for Mrs. Leonard, determined if she saw her to offer her a place in the carriage, even at the risk of a little inconvenience to the party who had come in it. But Mrs. Leonard's seat, if indeed she had any definite one, was remote from the Pengarthen pew, and as Frederick hurried them all out on Fanny's account, Lizzie was forced to abandon her kind-hearted intention, and to content herself with the hope that the lady about whom she was anxious had found another conveyance.

That such, however, was not the case became evident to the whole party before they had driven very far from the village on their road home, for suddenly a female figure, moving with great rapidity in spite of her

dripping garments and the terrible state of the roads, loomed in the distance; and Frederick, who had just been officiously wrapping Miss Clare's thin shawl tighter round her, exclaimed with a laugh:

"There goes my saintly step-mother, looking marvellously like a water wag-tail. Do turn round for a moment, Fanny, and admire how the old girl steps out."

While Miss Fanny tittered at the amusing novelty to which her attention had been drawn, Lizzie sprang up and was endeavouring to stop the coachman.

"For Heaven's sake what are you about?" exclaimed her husband, when he gathered something of her intention. "You are not dreaming of greeting the dowager in this deluge of rain, and upon this muddy road, are you, Lizzie? Sit down and keep quiet I implore of you."

"I want to make Richard understand that he is to stop and take Mrs. Leonard in," Lizzie replied, with a little effort at firmness,

"it is quite impossible that we can drive by and leave her to walk home in such a storm. We can easily make room for her."

"My dear child, you are certainly demented," said Frederick, laughing (he generally laughed when he was saying or doing a particularly disagreeable thing). "Imagine the introduction of that very dripping water wag-tail amongst you three elegantly dressed ladies—besides, it would certainly give Frances her death. It is provoking enough to think of her having come out at all to-day."

"But, Frederick—"

"Now, hush, Lizzie, and don't make a little goose of yourself. The thing is simply impossible, as anyone but a child like yourself would see. Let the old girl trudge; it will do her a world of good. Saints enjoy a thorough soaking amazingly in coming from church. It makes them feel so virtuous."

Mrs. Leonard did not look up as the Pengarthen carriage drove rapidly past her. Had she done so she would have discovered at least

one pale, indignant face amongst its occupants, and her weary walk would have appeared less weary in the conviction that the poor little wife had not yet grown selfish from the pressure of her own individual cares.

As a matter of course the sudden change in the weather, and her imprudent exposure to it, had increased Miss Fanny's cold so much that she could not appear down stairs again that day, and Alice brought word to her host and hostess that she was really feverish, and could eat nothing but a few peaches and the jelly Lizzie had caused Miss Ash to make for her the previous day. Frederick wanted to have a doctor sent for, but Alice said there was no need at present, that her sister was rather subject to such colds, and that she would doubtless be better after a night's rest.

Lizzie stole a moment that evening to go to Mrs. Leonard's rooms. Her object was to apologise for the apparent inhumanity of not having offered her a seat in the carriage in the morning, to mention Fanny Clare's indis-

position as the reason why Frederick had been afraid to expose her to contact with the damp garments of a pedestrian ; and to say how very sorry she, Lizzie, had been on her own account at not having encountered Mrs. Leonard before leaving the church.

But unfortunately these kindly-meant excuses were not destined at present to be spoken. Mrs. Leonard's old attendant came out, in reply to Lizzie's knock, and said that her mistress had felt very poorly ever since her return from church, and was now gone to bed with a sore throat and headache. She would not disturb her for any consideration.

The last news from Frances Clare that night, through the medium of her sister, was that she had been very sick, but was now feeling better, and hoped to get to sleep and be quite well in the morning.

At breakfast time that next morning Lizzie's patience was again severely tried by the very public manifestation of her husband's anxiety concerning their invalid guest. She had

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rested well, Alice announced, and her cough had been much less troublesome ; but after taking only a few spoonfuls of jelly the sickness had returned, and she was feeling weak and languid from its effects. Alice would consent to have the doctor called in if these symptoms continued during the day. She was to bring down constant bulletins of the interesting sufferer's progress.

Frederick would be strolling on the lawn or the terrace with two or three other gentlemen belonging to their party.

Lizzie was in no mood to find entertainment for her indolent lady guests that morning. Her heart was burning with more positive bitterness than she had hitherto allowed to enter it, and this had been increased by the remarks of two or three of her companions on Mr. Leonard's extraordinary interest in the very trifling indisposition of Fanny Clare. The married ladies had said they should like to see *their* husbands making such a fuss

about another woman's cold, and the single ones had declared that it was enough to frighten them from getting married at all, when husbands of less than six months "went on in *that way*."

Lizzie did not relish being pitied, very much more than her imperious housekeeper, and to give a new turn to the thoughts and conversation of her guests she proposed an adjournment to the lawn, where she doubted not the younger ladies would soon be joined and entertained by the gentlemen. Having conducted them thither, leaving some of the elders to carry their work and their gossip into the shrubberies where cool seats and shady walks abounded, Mrs. Frederick Leonard turned back towards the house, intending to pay a short visit to Frances Clare, and at the same time to send Isaure, with some jelly and a message of inquiry concerning her health, to Mrs. Leonard.

In crossing the hall, she met Miss Ash

going towards the dining-room with a china basket of splendid-looking purple grapes in her hand.

"Oh, Leah," exclaimed Lizzie, stopping immediately, "wherever did you get that magnificent fruit? I thought we could have no grapes for the next six weeks. I never saw such beauties as these. What are you going to do with them?"

A peculiar smile appeared for a moment on Miss Ash's face as she replied to both of her mistress's questions:

"I had them from Humphreys, ma'am, and I am going to take them to Mr. Leonard. He ordered the gardener to force them more than a week ago for Miss Clare. Humphreys is proud of his success, and wanted to show them to you himself, but I told him he should have his due share of praise. I believe he has spared neither trouble nor expense, according to his master's orders; they are certainly very beautiful, are they not?"



The little spirit dwelling in Lizzie's breast had been growing more and more rampant all the time Leah was speaking; the calm voice of the housekeeper goaded it nearly to madness; the remembrance of the rare flower, the diamond bracelet, of the devoted attentions of yesterday, all concurred to stir up this small spirit's hottest wrath and to render moderation or quiet endurance just then a thing impossible.

"*I* want these grapes, Leah," Lizzie said, stretching out a hand that shook with emotion for the fragile basket; "Mrs. Leonard is ill, as well as Miss Clare, and I think she has the first right to them. I shall take them to her at once, and if Mr. Leonard inquires for them, you can tell him that I have done so."

In spite of Leah's well-tutored features, they could not help betraying some little astonishment at this very unlooked for outbreak on the part of the gentle mistress of the Hall; but not a word was spoken by the obedient

subordinate, as she yielded up the basket and turned quietly back towards her own apartments.

In the meanwhile Lizzie mounted the long stairs at a dangerously rapid pace—could it be that she questioned the power of that irate little spirit to hold its own for any length of time against the natural timidity and meekness of her character?—and without even pausing to take breath, ran swiftly down the corridor that led to Mrs. Leonard's rooms, only stopping when the thick double doors that guarded them checked her further progress.

"I want particularly to see your mistress to-day!" she exclaimed, the instant the old woman presented herself; "I won't stay ten minutes; I won't fatigue her with talking; I will go away the moment you tell me I must; but do, please do contrive for me to see her."

"Walk in, ma'am," replied the servant gently, as if in consideration of the excitement Lizzie was so recklessly betraying; "my

mistress is rather better this morning and will no doubt be happy to see you."

So Lizzie went in, and finding herself suddenly face to face with Mrs. Leonard, who was up and seated in a easy chair by the window, her courage a little wavered, and she had great difficulty in speaking her short, agitated greeting.

When Mrs. Leonard had replied kindly though still not warmly to this, the younger lady put the basket of grapes into the other's lap, saying, eagerly :

"I have brought you these for your sore throat. Please to eat them ; they are the first we have gathered ; they will do you so much good."

"Thank you," Mrs. Leonard replied, a smile that was very cheering to see—some smiles are—breaking over her countenance. "I will eat a few, to show you I am grateful for your kindness ; but I do not need luxuries of any sort myself. If these are to be really mine unconditionally, I shall take or send

them to a poor girl who is dying in the village. You will be willing for them to be so disposed of?"

"Oh yes," faltered Lizzie, with a pale cheek, and the small spirit quickly subsiding into nothingness within her; "do whatever you like with them. I wish—"

She was going to say, she wished they had been given under different circumstances; that she might have enjoyed the full satisfaction of believing they had brought pleasure and relief to one really suffering; but instead of finishing her sentence she paused abruptly, raised her hand to her head, and burst into passionate tears.

She was still but a very child, and the feelings so constantly and hardly wrought upon were not always under her own control.

Mrs. Leonard suffered the tears to flow unquestioned for a few minutes. Then, as there appeared no sign of their abating, she took her young guest's hand, and said, kindly :

"I fear you are not well yourself this morning. You have been, perhaps, keeping later hours than, in your own home, you were accustomed to do. May I get you a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee?"

But this allusion to her former happy home had brought Lizzie's grief to a climax, and instead of replying to Mrs. Leonard's hospitable offer, she laid her poor head upon the table, and sobbed out in most childish fashion:

"Oh, if mamma were only here! I am so very, very unhappy."

Mrs. Leonard, with all her wise resolves, was scarcely proof against this. She drew a little nearer to the weeping girl, put her hand tenderly upon the bowed head, and waited thus till Lizzie should speak again. The next words were:

"I am ashamed of behaving in this foolish way, of troubling *you* with my childish troubles. I did not mean it when I came to you with the grapes. I only wanted to give

them to you myself; and to tell you how sorry I was about yesterday. I suppose everybody is unhappy at times; but I am so weak and stupid that I cannot hide anything that vexes me. Please to forget that I have been so silly—I think I had better go back to my own room now.”

“ You shall do as you like,” Mrs. Leonard said, with growing esteem for the brave little wife, who had refrained, even under the excitement of some evidently recent shock, to breathe a word against her husband—“ you shall do as you like, my dear—but before you leave me I want to tell you, that any help or comfort, or advice, it may be in my power to give you, will be heartily at your service. There are some troubles, indeed, that every woman to whom they come must and ought to bear alone—I mean as regards *human* sympathy—but if anything occurs to you in which I may safely and righteously counsel or help you, as your own mother would do, then come to me fearlessly. I have trodden a

thorny road myself; and there are few thorns peculiar to women's pathways with which I have not been, at one time or another, familiar. Trust me, we can all find strength—I do not say our own—to bear the burden that is laid upon us. The shoulders ache terribly at first, but they grow used to the aching as well as to the weight that occasions it. At fifty, or near it, I have better spirits, a lighter heart, a more contented mind than I had at any former period of my life—and yet for many a long year I carried a back-breaking burden, which I had no hope of laying down but on my grave. Those trials which *seem* to be dragging and chaining us to the earth have often a very different mission, and we find when they are over—not perhaps before—that in reality they have been insensibly attracting us into purer and higher regions, where, even if the same afflictions would be repeated, they could never again affect us in a similar degree. My dear child, forgive an old woman's moralizing, and extract from all

I have said, at least, this consolation—that no suffering, however severe, can be perpetual, and that the heart has a capacity for endurance, and for rising, in the end, above all its sorrows, which, in its first surprised acquaintance with grief, it could not even dream of. You wish to go now?”

“Yes,” said Lizzie, who was already standing up, and looking restlessly anxious as well as sad; “I don’t feel very well, and I think Mr. Leonard may be inquiring for me. Thank you a thousand times for your kindness—you don’t know how I feel it—I am stupid and unable to express anything properly to-day. Good-bye.”

She raised her face, all tear-stained as it was, in such a pleading, wistful way, that Mrs. Leonard must have been less than human had she refused to kiss it. Having the half-asked-for embrace to bestow, she did it in so cordial a fashion that Lizzie was not likely again to be in danger of thinking her husband’s step-mother cold.



Poor child ! she had great need of one such little sweet drop to temper the exceeding bitterness of the cup that was even then preparing for her in another part of the house.

## CHAPTER XX.

## A TYRANT WITHOUT HIS MASK.

THE conviction that a scene with her husband was inevitable, and that she had really done enough to excite his anger, became so clear to the wife's mind as she walked tremblingly from Mrs. Leonard's rooms in the direction of her own, that, the small spirit utterly quenched now, and her natural cowardice re-assuming its dominion—Lizzie felt as if she would have given worlds to undo her morning's work, or to escape by any means its too probable consequences.

Isaure stood, apparently waiting for her mistress at the door of the dressing room.

"Monsieur has been up twice within the last quarter of an hour to see if Madame was here. He wishes very particularly to speak to her at once in the library."

This was what the girl said, looking as if she suspected something unusual was going on, and as if she enjoyed the suspicion exceedingly.

If Lizzie had hesitated a single instant she would have lacked courage to obey her husband's summons. Her only chance was to meet the storm without thinking of it in advance, to rush blindly into the elements whose angry violence she had no possible means of averting.

Frederick was standing by the centre table in the library as she nervously opened the door. One hand was grasping a chair—not too tenderly—the other was employed in pulling at his very gracefully curled whiskers, as if in the excitement of his feelings he had forgotten that they were his own, and believed them the property of some other individual

on whom it was a satisfaction to him to inflict this trifling injury.

"You want me, Frederick?" said the poor wife, almost gasping for breath, as she made the discovery that the very sight of her seemed to take from her husband the power of utterance.

He let go his hold of the chair and suspended that cruel sacrifice of his auburn whiskers. Those light blue eyes which could assume an expression of such melting softness flashed as if a sudden fire—and that not from above—had been kindled behind them. He made three or four hasty steps towards his wife and then paused abruptly as if—so, at least, that trembling little woman thought—he dared not trust himself a single inch nearer.

"Where are those grapes?" The words came out with difficulty—there could be no doubt at all about it—on account of the ungovernable passion that was raging within

him. Lizzie's cheek burnt hotly for a moment and then grew pale as death :

"Frederick, pray forgive me. I know now I was very wrong. I did it on the impulse of the moment. I could not help feeling annoyed and indignant at your thinking so much of Fanny Clare. I remembered the flower which I had wanted so much for Mrs. Leonard, and how, yesterday, you would not take her into the carriage in all that pouring rain lest Frances should be inconvenienced. Mrs. Leonard has a cold, too, and a sore throat from that terrible walk, and so I carried the grapes to her."

All this was spoken disjointedly, and with little catches for breath which, in proving how desperately frightened the speaker really was, probably afforded some slight satisfaction to the incensed listener. He waited till Lizzie had quite done, and then, nearly as pale as herself, he said—

"If you were not both a child and a fool,

I would make you bitterly repent the daring insult you have this day offered to me. As it is, I charge you for your own sake never again, under any possible circumstances, to oppose my will, or imagine yourself authorized—because you bear my name—to take possession of anything on which my seal has once been set. If I choose to give all the flowers in the conservatories, and all the fruit in the hothouse, to Fanny Clare or to anybody else, it is no concern of yours, and I would turn both you and that canting old hypocrite out of my house, rather than endure a repetition of what I have this morning had to put up with.”

He paused here for a moment in apparent enjoyment of the cold terror his words seemed to strike into the heart of his timid and astonished wife. No man can understand the strange effect of masculine violence, either by speech or action, upon a refined and sensitive woman, who, for the first time in her life, is made the victim of it; and Frederick Leonard

was not one to remember, with any compunction for his brutality, that his little Lizzie had been brought up wholly amongst gentle, tender-hearted females, from whose lips she was never likely to have heard a single harsh, or even irritable word. His object at present was to make a strong impression upon her, and her blanched face and lips, her wonderingly dilated eyes, her clasped hands whose excessive trembling he could plainly discern, gave him every reason to hope he had succeeded.

Finding, however, that his companion showed no signs of intending to speak again, he continued:—

“If I were to permit myself to dwell upon this matter, I believe it would drive me mad. In my very wildest dreams I could never have imagined you capable of such conduct. It has created a gulf between us, remember, that years of dutiful obedience and submission on your part will scarcely be able to span over. A woman who defies her husband is odious in

every point of view. All the grace and beauty in the world cannot make up for it—but you understand me now, I hope, and will not oblige me to pursue this hateful subject. I am going out for the day. Attend to your guests in my absence, and let none of them be neglected on account of the agitation this scene you have brought upon yourself may possibly occasion you.”

Lizzie tried now to speak, to give at least some sign that her husband’s words had been attended to, but there was a tight sensation in her throat, a feeling as if a hand were grasping it and trying to strangle her. Frederick must have seen how it was with her, and if there had been anything less of calculation (even if there had been more of passion in his present feelings) he certainly would have made some attempt to soothe the cruel, overpowering emotion he had himself excited—but the future was in his mind, that future wherein he intended his wife to be as completely subservient to his every whim and



fancy as if she had been a purchased slave, bound under terror of the lash to obey her master; so he took no notice at all of the too evident suffering he had provoked, but with another emphatic "remember!" coolly passed his wife, and without even offering her a chair, went out of the room, leaving her alone in her dismay and misery.

Independently of all this, Lizzie was really not well, as she had truly confessed to Mrs. Leonard, and scarcely had her husband closed the door when she grasped at the nearest seat, shivered violently for a moment, and then fainted.

Nearly an hour afterwards, for it was apparently by the merest accident that she had been found at all—the library rarely being entered in the absence of Mr. Leonard—Lizzie awoke to consciousness upon her own bed, and met, to her bewilderment, the great oriental-looking eyes of Leah Ash, bent anxiously and almost tenderly upon her.

With a too clear and vivid remembrance of

the scene that had preceded her fainting, Lizzie raised her aching head and stretched out her hand gratefully to her silent attendant.

"Leah, how kind this is of you. I know I have been ill. I feel very unwell yet; but what brought you to me? where is Isaure? How was I got from the library?"

"I found you in the library, ma'am, and not being able to restore you I had you carried upstairs as soon as possible. Isaure was frightened when she saw you looking so white and death-like, and as she could do you no good I sent her away. I have been used to fainting fits myself, and am not at all nervous; but you had better take something now, ma'am, or you will be going off again. Here is some sal volatile I have mixed ready for you; indeed, it will do you good."

For Lizzie had turned with a little impatient gesture from the proffered restorative;—probably she did not care just then to be done good to,—and was attempting to rise.

"I must get up, Leah. I feel suffocated

lying here. I want air; my head is aching so very much. Do you know whether my—whether Mr. Leonard is gone out, as he thought of doing, for the day?"

"I believe he is gone out. I saw the horses brought round for himself and two other gentlemen. Do pray, ma'am, keep quiet for the present."

"Oh! but I cannot, Leah. I have all my guests down stairs waiting for me. I *must* entertain them in Mr. Leonard's absence—he left me strict orders to do so. Please ring for Isaure to come and dress me."

Again Leah, with increased earnestness, pleaded the necessity for continued repose.

"The ladies all know you are ill, ma'am, and will amuse themselves for once without you. Try to sleep, at least for an hour. I will read to you, to make it easier, if you please."

"No, no, Leah, I could not listen to a book just now, but it is very good of you to offer to read to me, and if I must stay here you may

sit and talk to me a little. I like your voice ; it reminds me strangely of the home voices to-day—oh ! Sarah, Sarah, my darling !”

This last was in a whisper, and with the speaker's head buried passionately in the soft pillows that had been heaped unsparingly under it, but Leah must have guessed the purport of the too suggestive words, for the moment after she leant a little closer to her young mistress, and said soothingly :

“ Why do you not have some of your people from home to come and stay with you ? They would be better than all these strangers.”

Lizzie shook her head ; she dared not trust her voice to speak in reply to this, neither could she say to Leah Ash that she would not for worlds the dear ones at home should have knowledge of her present unhappiness. So she only shook her head ; and then pressed her hands tightly upon each throbbing temple, as if the aching were becoming intolerable.

Leah proved now that her accomplishments

were not confined to singing and drawing, however great an adept she might be in these. Her skill and tenderness in nursing were beyond all praise, and very soon she had the satisfaction of perceiving that her charge had fallen into a quiet sleep, which gave every promise of being a refreshing one.

Then the housekeeper sat down by the side of the bed, and after a few minutes' wrapt and earnest contemplation of the sorrowful and beautiful young face on which she had never before had so good an opportunity of gazing, fell into a long, long train of thought, that was only disturbed when Isaure appeared at the door some two hours later with the announcement that Miss Ash's dinner had been waiting till it was cold.

"I do not want it," Leah said, motioning for Isaure to remain where she was. "Keep everybody away from this room till I ring; and if Mr. Leonard returns before that, request him to remain downstairs till I come to speak to him."

"Then you think Madame is very ill?—You don't think she is going to die, do you?"

"I think you are quite unfit to be her waiting woman," replied Leah, indignantly, "and I should recommend you, unless you can pluck up a little more courage, to give up your place immediately. If I mistake not," she added to herself, as the incensed Isaure flounced out of the room—"there will be scenes enough and illnesses enough in this house to frighten a braver person than that silly Frenchwoman will ever be. Going to die! Ah, poor child! That would be the happiest lot that could now befall her. If she were my sister I think I would pray that she might die to-night."

The sun was near its setting when Lizzie woke from her long, undisturbed sleep, to find her patient attendant watching over her still.

"Leah, how shall I thank you?" she said, as soon as she had collected her scattered senses and knew how late it was—"you must

have had a weary day of it in this dark room."

"I could not have been better employed," Leah answered, gravely, "and I have not felt weary at all. Your head, I hope, is easier."

Before Lizzie had time to answer, a messenger (not Isaure this time) came to the door with a command from Mr. Leonard, who had been returned about a quarter of an hour, for Miss Ash to attend him immediately in the library.

END OF VOL. I.

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| 12 Dessert Forks .. .. .       | 1 4 0                                     | 1 10 0           | 1 13 0                                    | 1 15 0                 |
| 12 Dessert Spoons .. .. .      | 1 4 0                                     | 1 10 0           | 1 12 0                                    | 1 15 0                 |
| 12 Tea Spoons .. .. .          | 16 0                                      | 1 0 0            | 1 2 0                                     | 1 5 0                  |
| 6 Egg Spoons, gilt bowls       | 10 0                                      | 12 0             | 12 0                                      | 13 6                   |
| 2 Sauce Ladles .. .. .         | 6 0                                       | 8 0              | 8 0                                       | 9 0                    |
| 1 Gravy Spoon .. .. .          | 6 6                                       | 9 0              | 10 0                                      | 11 0                   |
| 2 Salt Spoons, gilt bowls      | 3 4                                       | 4 0              | 4 0                                       | 4 6                    |
| 1 Mustard Spoon, gilt bowl     | 1 8                                       | 2 0              | 2 0                                       | 2 3                    |
| 1 Pair of Sugar Tongs .. .. .  | 2 6                                       | 3 6              | 3 6                                       | 4 0                    |
| 1 Pair of Fish Carvers .. .. . | 1 4 0                                     | 1 10 0           | 1 10 0                                    | 1 10 0                 |
| 1 Butter Knife .. .. .         | 2 6                                       | 4 0              | 5 6                                       | 6 0                    |
| 1 Soup Ladle .. .. .           | 10 0                                      | 12 0             | 16 0                                      | 17 0                   |
| 1 Sugar Sifter .. .. .         | 3 3                                       | 4 6              | 4 6                                       | 5 0                    |
| <b>Total .. .. .</b>           | <b>9 19 9</b>                             | <b>12 9 0</b>    | <b>13 9 6</b>                             | <b>14 17 3</b>         |

Any Article to be had singly at the same prices. An oak chest to contain the above, and a relative number of Knives, &c., £2 15s. Tea and Coffee Sets, Dish Covers, and Corner Dishes, Cruet and Liqueur Frames, &c., at proportionate prices. All kinds of Re-plating done by the patent process.

## WILLIAM S. BURTON,

General Furnishing Ironmonger,

*By Appointment to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales,*

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